

# *Mastay*

The Alchemy of the Reunion



Marc Torra

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2011, Marc Torra

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## Ayni Clause



BEFORE THE ARRIVAL of Europeans in South America, no form of currency was used by the Andean civilisation. Their exchanges were based on *ayni*, a word that can be translated as 'reciprocity'. But *ayni* implies something much more than simple reciprocity. **It involves the recognition and acceptance by the entire community of a natural law that gives back in proportion to what was given.**

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# The Weft



THIS BOOK IS like a fabric. It was written by interweaving a weft<sup>1</sup> and a warp. The following seven chapters make the weft:

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## *Water*

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<sup>1</sup> The weft are the crosswise threads on a loom that are passed over and under the warp threads to make cloth.

# The Warp



THE FOLLOWING SEVENTEEN fables, legends, allegories, parables, myths, models and stories make the warp.

Fable of the Caterpillar, [19](#)

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This book is dedicated to those men and women  
who I call, 'the Earth People',  
because they represent both our past,  
and our best hope for the future.

The aim of this book is to stimulate the mind,  
and in doing so, help the reader to expand it.

For only by expanding the mind can we transcend it;  
and only in transcending the mind,  
it will be realised that  
we are neither body nor mind,  
but pure consciousness.

That is why this book is written to help you imagine,  
and through imagining, inspire;  
and through inspiring, expand;  
and through expanding, transcend;  
and through transcending, understand that I am you,  
and that you are Everything.



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## Introduction

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*Illuminated by the light of a new sun,  
so dawned that prophesied day.*

*For the Aztecs it is 'the First Sun';  
the Hopis and Mayas call it 'the Fifth World';  
for the Incas it is the 'Taripay Pacha'—  
'the Age of Meeting Ourselves Again'.  
In the Bible, are the thousand years of peace  
promised in Revelation.*

*On this day we,  
children of Mother Earth and Father Sun,  
shed our puberty  
to become serene and mature;  
to witness the birth of a new dawn  
and understand once again.*



IT IS SAID that the Q'ero are the last direct descendants of the Inca who, thanks to their isolation, managed to preserve the old traditions of the culture that gave them birth. Their ancestors fled the domination of the Conquistadors to seek refuge in the high valleys of the Andes Mountains, for they had known that a period of upheaval, initiated by the ninth *pachakuti*<sup>2</sup>, was to come. There they lived for over five centuries, tucked away so securely that they remained isolated from the rest of the world and undisturbed by the few people who walked the Andes' paths. With them an ancient prophecy survived.

This prophecy told of a long night—a difficult period that would last for five hundred years. It also foretold; however, that after this time, a new age of peace and harmony would come; a day when a new Sun would shine in the sky. This day would dawn with the “Mastay”—the reunion of the people from the four directions.<sup>3</sup>

The symbol of the four directions refers to humanity as a whole, irrespective of race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, social class, or any other label one might use to classify oneself, either as a member of a group or as an individual, separated from others.

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<sup>2</sup> The term, *pachakuti* means, “time, world” (*Pacha*) and, “to overturn, turn back” (*kuti*). The “ninth *pachakuti*” refers to the arrival of Francisco Pizarro in 1526. Long before the Conquistadors barged in on the Incas, the *Amautas* (wise ones) had read in the stars that they were approaching a trying, but necessary period. Their reading had implied the clashing of two worlds and two distinct visions of life, where one would impose itself upon the other. And so, the Incas had known, with the arrival of the Conquistadors, that life would become difficult and that these people were going to snatch up all the riches of their civilisation. Nevertheless, they had understood that this was necessity, for they could see that five hundred years in the future they would witness the arrival of the tenth *pachakuti*. During this period, order will prevail over chaos, humanity will once again be reunited, and they will be able to restore the wisdom of the peoples of all oppressed cultures. Under the guidance of this period, humanity will enter into a new era of peace and harmony.

<sup>3</sup> Berg, Brad. “Prophecies of the Q'ero Incan Shamans”, *Share International Magazine*, (1997): January

Similar legends and prophecies are to be found in many traditions around the world. For example, a legend that is still told in America describes how, after the Great Deluge destroyed the world<sup>4</sup>, the Creator gathered all the survivors together and said them:

*I am going to give you the Original Teachings and then divide you into four groups, and send you to the four directions. To each group, I will bestow power over one of the four elements of Nature: Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. When the cycle ends, we shall reunite once again. If, by then, you have not forgotten the Original Teachings, you shall share them with the others and initiate a period of peace and harmony. But should my words be forgotten, the world will suffer destruction and will have to start all over again.*

A Huitoto elder of the Hitomi community told me his version of this story in August of 1995, while I was in the Amazon. Hopi elders narrate a similar legend.<sup>5</sup> In some of the myths, humanity is divided according to the four elements. Some make no reference to the elements but instead divide the world into four parts.<sup>6</sup> Others tell of four couples who repopulate the world after the Great Deluge.<sup>7</sup> While other prophecies, such as that of the *Inkarri*,

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<sup>4</sup> Such destruction seems to coincide with the accelerated melting of the glaciers, which took place between 8 and 15 thousand years ago, after the last ice age. During this 7 thousand years there were short periods of time known as, “melt water pulses” during which the melting was exacerbated.

<sup>5</sup> Lee Brown, a member of the Chérokee nation, learned a very similar legend from the Hopi elders.

<sup>6</sup> Garcilaso de la Vega’s book, *Royal Commentaries of the Incas*, relates a legend about how “After the Flood...a man appeared in Tiwanaku [Lake Titicaca] who was so powerful that he divided the world into four parts.”

<sup>7</sup> The most common example of this story is to be found in the Bible. It tells of how Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives—amounting to four couples—were the only people to survive the Great Deluge. Among the Inca we find a similar story, the Legend of the Ayar Brothers. It tells of how, after the Great Deluge, four brothers left Pacaritambo with their wives to establish the *Tawantinsuyu*, the Incan State.

relate a similar allegory, which says that the *Tawantinsuyu*—the ancient Inca State— will be re-established when the head of the last Inca is reunited with the four portions his body was chopped into by the Conquistadores.<sup>8</sup>

All of these legends and prophecies foretell a golden age, which will begin after a reunion—or Mastay—of four body parts, directions, elements, races, or great civilisations. This reunion heralds the arrival of the Age of Aquarius or the Thousand Years of Peace that follow the Apocalypse as promised by the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

In the tarot one can see a significant progression between the fifteenth arcana (XV), “the Devil”, and the seventeenth arcana (XVII), “the Star.” The Devil is associated with the rampant materialism plaguing us all today. The Star shows a naked woman pouring the water of universal love into the river of life. She embodies Aquarius, the water carrier. Between these two stands the sixteenth arcana (XVI), “the Tower”. This card represents our awakening to technological and materialistic illusion through a mass ejection or flare from our star—the Sun.

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<sup>8</sup> *Inkarri* myth tells of how the Conquistadors chopped the body of the last Inca into four pieces, and then buried each part in a different location. These body parts, it is said, grow beneath the earth, and will continue to grow until they have developed enough to be able to be united with their head, when the Inca will return to reestablish the *Tawantinsuyu* (Incan State).

<sup>9</sup> “... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (King James Bible, Revelation 20:4). “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” (Rev. 20:5). “and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison,” (Rev. 20:7)



Jean Dodal, 1712

In accordance with these legends and symbols is the prophecy known as, “the Encounter between the Eagle of the North and the Condor of the South”, which tells of the splitting of humanity into two as it occurred at the beginning of the current cycle. In this prophecy we see the eagle on one hand, representing the unnatural path of rationality and materialism, and the condor on the other, representing the intuitive and spiritual path of those who maintain close ties with nature. The eagle exemplifies the people of the West, and in the Mastay they are called, “the Fire People”. The condor embodies the indigenous people of the land.<sup>10</sup> “The Earth people” is what they are called in the Mastay.

The purpose of this book is to encourage the reunion of humanity, allowing the long awaited “Age of Harmony” to make its entrance. With this purpose in mind, I have written Mastay in the form of a spiritual narrative. This is a story adorned with parables, fables, myths and legends, all emerging through the exchange of words between the characters. Each tale introduces an individual and their life; and each individual embodies a direction, an element, and a particular civilisation.

<sup>10</sup> The legend appears carved in a wall in Mayapan, a Mayan site in Yucatan, México. Mayan teacher, Don Alejandro, also recounted this legend along with many other teachers. It also appears in the book: Perkins, John. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers. 2004. p.209-210

This journey unfolds with the story of Vivek, who hails from the East and represents the Air People. Vivek belongs to the Eastern Civilisation and lived in India during the time of the Gupta Dynasty<sup>11</sup>, a period which is considered by many to have been a golden age for the Indian subcontinent.

Following this is the tale of Fatima, who represents the Water People. She stands for the North, as most of her people dwell in the Tropic of Cancer.<sup>12</sup> Fatima is a Muslim and lived during the Abbasid Dynasty in a city which is present-day Baghdad.<sup>13</sup> It is said that during this period, Islam was unparalleled in its splendour.

David, whose story follows, represents the Fire People. He hails from the West and was born in 1971 on the East Coast of the United States, when this country's golden age had just come to an end.

Our final character, Mama Tuk, is an Aboriginal woman who represents the Earth People. She hails from the South, from the Tropic of Capricorn.<sup>14</sup> Of the four protagonists, Mama Tuk is the only one sharing an experience which is to occur in the future; to be specific, five hundred years from now.

In chapter five, titled, "the Point of Reunion", these characters come together to engage in a conversation. They meet on a subtle plane of consciousness, that inner place from which our thoughts originate. Essentially, these characters await the opportunity to spark a similar meeting or *Mastay*, one that will occur on our

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<sup>11</sup> The Gupta Dynasty ruled from 320 to 550 A.D.

<sup>12</sup> The Tropic of Cancer is positioned in the Northern hemisphere. Cancer is a water sign.

<sup>13</sup> The Abbasids ruled from 750 to 1258 A.D.

<sup>14</sup> The Tropic of Capricorn is located in the Southern hemisphere. Capricorn is considered an earth sign.

planet; a meeting between, not only four, but between each and every one of us. For this, the descendants of the Incas have been waiting for five centuries.

This work is intended to serve as a reminder of the Original Teachings, as interpreted by the peoples of every direction and every element. It seeks to pursue that which we have in common, that which balances us. Moreover, it endeavours to return balance to our planet, beginning with our own inner world in the hope that it might subsequently unearth harmony between nations and cultures. In remembering these teachings, we will attain a better understanding of ourselves and our role in life. For it is said that we are all distinct expressions of the same Divinity and that our immediate responsibility lies in returning harmony to Mother Earth.

Marc Torra

*From the Land of the Gunai/Kurnai*

# Air



## \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The Sources of Maya \_\_\_\_\_



*He hails from the land of the rising Sun.*

*Born at the feet of the Himalaya,  
in the greatest mountains he grew to be a man,  
and climbed down from those heights  
where air is scarce.*

*There, you can touch the clouds with your fingers,  
or listen to news lifted on the winds.*

*From there, you can see beyond the trees,  
to the whole, the forest as one.*



## 🕉️ The City of Maya

THIS STORY BEGINS in the times of the Gupta Empire in a place the ancient peoples called *Mayapuri*, the City of Maya, which is nowadays called Haridwar. One of the oldest living cities, Haridwar stands at the point where the sacred river Ganges springs from the lofty peaks of the Himalaya to glide down through the vast plains of the Indian subcontinent. The gods once walked this land, leaving their footprints behind. Ever has it been a place of pilgrimage, visited each day by hundreds of worshippers, people who come to bathe in the icy water of the sacred river. The City of Maya is and always was the last stop on the mother of all pilgrimages

Every twelve years, when Jupiter enters the sign of Aquarius and the Sun comes into Aries, the *Purna Kumbha Mela* takes place. It is during this time that visitors to Haridwar may be counted in the millions. Some of them, such as the *Naga Sadhus*, walk the streets naked, their bodies covered in ash. Others, like the *Urdhwavahurs*, practice severe austerity. The *Parivajakas* take a vow of silence. The *Shirshasins* spend day and night standing on their feet or heads, and sleep upright, leaning on canes. The *Kalpvasis* devote themselves entirely to ritual, performing ablutions three times a day and worshipping the river as Mother. All of them come to this place because tradition holds that whoever bathes here on an auspicious day will see the veil of maya dissolve, and thereby transcend the cycle of death and rebirth.

Since his childhood, Vivek, a youth of Haridwar, had watched the procession of pilgrims pass by his house. As a boy he had loved following the crowds down to the river to see them descend into the water by the great stone stairs called *ghats*. Once, when he had been there with his father, Vivek had asked the man why the pilgrims did that.

“They hope to attain *moksha*, the liberation of the soul, and dissolve the veil of *maya*,” he had replied.

*What is the veil of maya?* Vivek had wondered.

The river had always been a part of Vivek’s life. He had spent much of his childhood playing in its waters with his brothers; since as far back as he could remember he had helped his father take the daily offerings down to its shores. Nevertheless, after all the years and ablutions, Vivek, born in the City of Maya, still wondered, *what is this veil of maya, and how can the sacred river make it dissolve?*

His father, an orthodox Brahman, was an austere man who interpreted the Scriptures literally. When Vivek asked him about these things, he was never able to offer the youth a satisfying answer, so Vivek sought out the pilgrims. Even they left him unsatisfied, finding their explanations similar to his father’s—boring and baffling to his young mind.

“Maya is a mirage,” they would say. “It is the veil of a physical and mental reality that has captivated our Self, causing us to believe that, like the universe, we are also limited. It is the illusion we consider real; something transitory that we take to be absolute. It is a condition of our soul which makes us see multiplicity where there is only Unity and causes us to perceive reality in an equally fragmented way.”

In spite of these answers, Vivek still could not understand. No matter how hard he reasoned, he just couldn’t conceive of a world beyond the *maya* which seemed to encompass the very questions themselves. He was like a blind man trying to comprehend darkness and struggling to contrast the blackness in his mind with colours he could not perceive. *If I’m surrounded by maya, he thought, how can I transcend the illusory and see what’s real? How can I look beyond the veil if I am its captive?*

One day the young man decided to go to the shrine of Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music, and the arts. *If She-Who-Is-Invoked-By-Aspirants-To-Knowledge can't answer my questions, no-one can*, he thought.

When Vivek arrived at the shrine, he knelt before Saraswati's image, holding his offering in both hands. With his gaze lowered, he began reciting an invocation:

Oh Meri Maiya Saraswati, Goddess of knowledge!  
Who is fair like the jasmine-coloured Moon and the snow.  
Who is adorned in radiant white attire.  
Who holds in her hands the *Veena*<sup>15</sup> in an attitude of blessing.  
Whose throne is a white lotus  
and is adored by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.  
Protect me, dissolving the darkness  
and sluggishness that cloud my intellect.

Having finished the invocation, he placed his offering at the goddess' feet. Closing his eyes, he meditated for a long time, until the sounds from the emerging day drifted back into his consciousness, reminding him of his duties for the morning. When he finally opened his eyes, Vivek resolved that he would visit Saraswati every day. Standing, he headed off towards the riverbank to help his father with the daily offerings.

Days dragged by like this, days that Vivek spent kneeling before the small statue. Then, in the early hours of a moonless morning, after he had been meditating all night, a voice came to him from the corner of the temple:

"Do you know the fable of the caterpillar and the butterflies?"

*Who would interrupt me at a time like this?* Vivek wondered.

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<sup>15</sup> String instrument originating in ancient India.

Turning towards the voice, he saw a man with skin as furrowed and brown as an ancient road. He sat in the lotus position on the stone floor, his beard braided down his chest, his back against the wall. Vivek saw that the man's eyes were clouded with blindness, but nevertheless they seemed to watch him without seeing him, or rather, see him without watching him.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see you," said Vivek.

"Well, I've been sitting here all night. In fact, you pulled me out of my meditation when you started chanting to the Goddess Saraswati; but you didn't answer my question: Do you know the fable of the caterpillar and the butterflies?"

"No."

#### ✦ Fable of the Caterpillar ✦

"There was once a caterpillar who lived in a mulberry tree," the man began. "This creature thought himself quite fortunate, for he had plenty of food, and in the garden the weather was fine. Autumn seemed so far away that it brought no worry to his mind. He did not think about the day when those leaves would yellow and fall, and the mulberry tree would be bare. Autumn, he thought, why worry about autumn, if it's still spring here? The caterpillar was so satisfied with his life that he never pondered the possibility of a better existence, or considered the transitory nature of abundance, which is dependent on the seasons of the year."

The man paused and then added, "Do you understand the story?"

"Yes," Vivek replied. "The caterpillar represents all those people who, satisfied with their earthly life, don't stop to think that there might be something better, or that, someday their abundance will disappear. For it is our destiny that everything shall come to pass;

as certain as it is that autumn follows summer and that, after autumn, winter comes.”

“Yes!” the man replied, smiling, “but this fable is like a gift, carefully wrapped in more than one layer. You were able to understand the first, but can you extract the next one?”

“No,” Vivek replied.

“Living so comfortably and with such indifference,” continued the old man, “the caterpillar never realised that the mulberry tree was surrounded by a garden replete with flowers. This place was visited each day by a cloud of butterflies that drifted in from every corner of the forest to sip the nectar. Nevertheless, so content was the caterpillar that he never searched for a better life.”

The old man paused for a moment. Then, raising his head, he opened his blurred eyes fully to make sure that he had the boy’s attention and asked: “What do you think would happen if, one day, he glimpsed those butterflies?”

“Well, I suppose he would want to be one too.”

“But you’ll agree, won’t you, that the caterpillar must first know that butterflies exist? For isn’t the caterpillar’s reality limited to what happens on firm ground? Even if he did manage to evade his reality to imagine himself fluttering from flower to flower, isn’t the caterpillar by nature, practically blind? As long as he is a caterpillar he will never manage to see the butterflies, or perceive their reality. Of plants he knows only the flavour of leaves, not the nectar of flowers.”

“That’s sad!” said Vivek.

“It’s not so sad because one day, when the leaves fade and wither, and the wind blows them away, the caterpillar will start

thinking beyond the mulberry tree. On that day, he will also contemplate the possibility of becoming a butterfly.”

As the mendicant spoke, his beard moved with the rhythm of his words. Once again, Vivek had the strange impression that the man observed him without seeing him, or rather, saw him without needing to look. His eyes were the long staff with which he struck objects to identify not only their presence, but also their essence. This essence was transmitted through sound and vibration, through a voice that could only be perceived by someone using their ears to discern, and their touch to see. Stone, wood, sand—each emitted its distinct sound that the man could identify with perfect acuity.

The man again gathered the threads of his story and continued, and as he did, his long beard caressed the stone. “One day the caterpillar will discover that he can create a chrysalis. From that moment on, nothing on the mulberry tree will distract him. He will begin to create the means that will enable him to transmute.”

Vivek felt his disappointment turn into hope with his words.

The old man smiled. “What do you think the caterpillar will do once he has become a butterfly?” he asked.

“He will start to fly!” cried the youth.

“Yes! I see you understand the meaning of the story. Now tell me, what do you think the pilgrims are trying to do when they bathe in the river?”

“I suppose they see the water of the Mother Ganga as the chrysalis that will make them a butterfly,” replied Vivek.

“And is it?”

“I’ve bathed in her waters hundreds of times and I’m still a caterpillar.”

“Well then, the only chrysalis possible is the one that shrouds our hearts. Only when this opens will we be able to take flight. Only then, shall the veil of maya dissipate, and shall our eyes be opened so that we can perceive the garden of flowers around us.

...✚...

“Do you understand?”

“I follow your reasoning, but I can’t fully absorb the idea,” replied Vivek.

“Don’t try to understand maya by using your mind. To transcend the illusion we must use our hearts. Mind and maya are one and the same thing. They are the object, and the object cannot perceive itself. You are the subject however, the eternal essence—pure consciousness. Look inside yourself to connect with who you really are. Don’t seek for it on the outside.”

“Master, even so, it is difficult. I follow the theory; I’ve had similar answers from everyone I’ve asked, but I wish to experience it, to feel it instead of theorising about it. I think that’s the only way I’ll be able to fully understand.”

“You need the faith bestowed by experience (*shraddha*),” said the master. “This kind of faith does not ask us to believe another’s word without exploring the ideas personally. If you really want to understand, you will need to undergo a pilgrimage to the sources of the three sacred rivers: Yamuna, Ganges, and Sarasvati. This will give you the faith that comes when, in our caterpillar state, we perceive the garden of flowers that surrounds us.”

“A pilgrimage to the three sacred rivers!” cried Vivek.

He’d always seen the pilgrims as people who dedicated, not months, but years of their lives to reach a destiny that he lived in his own right or because of an accident of fate. That’s why the

youth felt cautious when this blind man, who he had only just met, proposed he should delve into the perilous Himalaya Mountains in search of the three sacred rivers.

“Yes, a pilgrimage. Once you are at their sources, look for the limit of the glacier, where ice gives way to a bubbling, crystal-clear stream. When you are here, kneel down and pronounce three times the sacred words I will bestow to you. Then, drink from the stream and prepare yourself for an experience.”

An experience. These words struck Vivek, for they were meaningful, not just banal intellectual promises. It was because of these words that the young man decided to open his ears and listen to the mantra, or magical invocation, that the old man recited for him. He would set out the very next day in search of the sources of the three sacred rivers.

When Vivek arrived home he announced to his parents that he was going on a journey. He said that he would be away for several months, but he didn't tell them exactly how long, or say just where he was going. This was a pilgrimage he wanted to undertake with no commitments, for he knew that in the mountains the days would grow long with monsoon downpours, and that time would stop under the weight of snowfalls. Before leaving, he found a thick woollen blanket for the cold, and a jar so that he might beg for money on the way. Then, he headed northwards. It was April and the snow on the mountains was beginning to thaw. He reasoned that if he hurried, he could make his way to the three destinations and be back before October, when the ice would again cover the roads.

## Yamuna

AS THE YAMUNA had been the first river mentioned by the mendicant, Vivek decided to respect his sequence exactly by making this his first destination. Halfway through the morning, he joined a group of renunciants on pilgrimage to the mountains, and together they started out on a route alongside the riverbank. This was a road that had been carved from the rocks of the gorges, a road of sculptured stone and sheer drops, a path to the roof of the world. Along the way they stopped to profess the accustomed rites to the God Shiva. While praying at these wayside shrines, they consumed a resin they had gathered from the flowers of a plant that grew wildly by the road. Soma, the renunciants called it. Vivek thought this custom to be more of an excuse to delay the journey, although there were times when he consumed it that it helped him understand in a deeper sense.

One month later, Vivek arrived at Yamunotri. Here he found that the exact source of the river was the cold lake of *Septarishi Kund*, the Lake of the Seven Wise Men. While standing on its shore, Vivek looked for the constellation that had given this place its name, seven stars that were now hidden in the North, watching him from behind the mountains and the intense May Sun.

The recent winter snows still dominated the landscape, although summer's influence was beginning to be noticeable. The ice melted with the heat of each new day, uncovering rocks and sediments, as well as weeds, yellow and withered with the cold.

Vivek walked to the small brook of crystal-clear waters emerging from beneath the frozen crust. Kneeling, he pronounced the invocation three times then took a deep draft of the water. As he swallowed, he was disappointed to find that nothing was happening. He decided he would take a nap at the foot of a great

rock, a spot where the grass had already been freed of its winter garb.

Vivek was drifting: his body relaxed and his mind delving into the world of dreams, when he noticed an abrupt sensation of rising energy, a wave that swept him away from his body and lifted him as if he was flying. It was then that he saw his body asleep, leaning against the large rock below. The space around him started to disappear.

In this place, the gleaming midday Sun was more resplendent, the sky's blue more intense, and he had never seen so many shades of white in the clouds. As he watched the mountains melt into each other like snow, the mingled scents of ice-burnt weed and glacial sediment grew more intense. The frozen surface of the lake diluted like a mirage. While moments before, the wind had caressed his skin, it now stood still, and a mantle of silence descended on the immensity of space surrounding him.

The mulberry tree gave way to the myriad of flowers in the garden, the caterpillar to the butterfly, as Vivek rose above the clouds to a place where the blue vanished and the sunshine melted away. From there, he looked north to see the constellation of the Seven Wise Men, also known as Ursa Major. Before now, the constellation had been hidden from him by sunlight and the peaks of the high mountains, but now Vivek could not only see it, he could hear the voice of each individual star. These voices vibrated all that surrounded them and there was a note for each of them, a colour for every note.

*This must be maya*, thought the young man, as the experience began to wane. *Maya means that everything surrounding me is illusory. That it is merely an impression on the mind of what is perceived by the senses. It's like the sky, which looks blue to us even though this*

*isn't its actual colour. Like the blue we use to paint the body of Divinity, it is the colour of the veil that covers the infinite cosmos.*

## **Ganges**

WHEN HE RETURNED to his normal state, the young pilgrim decided to continue on the path towards his second destination: the source of the River Ganges. Although the source was not far away, it was too risky to go through the mountains and traverse the peaks between here and there alone. So Vivek decided to go back to Barkot and from there take the route towards Gangotri.

Vivek reached Gangotri just before the start of the monsoon, when the little village was crowded with pilgrims who had come from all three sides of the subcontinent. After resting for a few days to recover from the intense hike, he set off to the glacier of Gaumukh, which was half a day's walk. This glacier was thought to be the source of the river. Just as Vivek was about to arrive and find out for himself, a blizzard swept down, taking him by surprise, and he was forced to take shelter in a small cave. After the winds had subsided, Vivek was so impatient to get to the glacier that he decided to continue, even though it was midnight. It's a full moon, so I won't have any problems finding the road, he thought.

When he arrived, the Moon was flaunting its gown in the southeast, and the wind had dissipated the clouds. It was a magical night, for a whole new calm had followed the tempest. The Moon displayed its pearly face as it slid above the peaks, watching over the firmament. Of all the stars and planets, only Jupiter was clearly visible to the young man. The rest were hidden behind a mantle of light, which the Moon wore with pride and intensity. Vivek saw the sky's glory as a good omen, because, just as the Sun was related to

the river Yamuna, the Moon was linked to Mother Ganga, and Jupiter represented 'the Teacher.'

When he found the point where the brook emerged from the glacier, Vivek knelt down and was still, watching the Moon. He noticed that it was already starting to hide in the west. When it had disappeared, the stars began to cover the sky, reminding him of the Ganges carpeted with tiny lamps—earthen bowls with wicks burning in clarified butter (*ghee*), which worshippers used to make their offerings and prayers. He knew at that moment that the time for pronouncing the invocation had come.

First, Vivek said the mantra that the man of the temple had whispered weeks before. Then, he took a sip of the water. Immediately, his consciousness started to shift. Yet this time, it wasn't the landscape that was vanishing, but his body, dissolving like a sugar cube in water. As it dissipated so too did his mind, spreading thin as smoke from a stick of incense caught in a breeze. His thoughts stopped.

In this state there was no distinction between object and subject. He realised that he and Everything that surrounded him were one and the same. He saw that time and space were illusory concepts invented by a mind anxious to confine and limit us all. Without space, multiplicity did not exist, transforming Everything into *that*, the only reality. Without time, past, present and future were united in a single instant. His 'I-ness' also vanished, liberating him from the mirage of maya. What had been darkness became light. What had been silence became a single sound that flooded and encompassed everything. In the centre was a *bindu*, a point from which *yantras*, or geometric figures flow. They were geometric archetypes flowing to the rhythm of an OM that permeated everything. This was the nectar, the *amrita* that the

butterflies so longed for which compelled them to fly from flower to flower.

He knew he was living the experience that yogis called *samadhi*. This was infinite rapture, mystical ecstasy; the supra-conscious state or the transitory enlightenment of the soul. It implied the dissolution of maya into the ocean of absolute consciousness.

## 🕉️ Sarasvatī

WHEN VIVEK RETURNED, he saw that the blue veil covered the heavens again. The Sun flashed its intense garb, for it was late on a spring day, and an intense fragrance similar to jasmine surrounded him. This was the scent of a mother embracing her child; the perfume of flowers from the spiritual plane he had just now come from. Once again Vivek was the caterpillar lying on the leaf of the mulberry tree.

He looked at the position of the Sun and realised that more than twelve hours must have passed since the beginning of his experience. When he re-established contact with his body, Vivek felt a terrible pain in his bones. He tried to stand, but found it impossible. He let out a soft whimper, a sound too quiet to attract the attention of the few pilgrims who ventured to that place. The night he had spent out in the open had taken its toll on his body. Despite his sorry plight, the people passed him without paying much attention. Most of them walked barefoot on the snow and ice. Some wore grey ashes as clothes, a wooden staff their only possession. This was why, when they saw him, they didn't think that a young man who seemed to be meditating wrapped in a good woollen blanket, needed any help.

Faint from exhaustion, he felt the cold weigh down his eyelids once more. There was a lump in his throat that made it hard to

breathe. *If this is my last breath*, he thought, *perhaps it is also the answer to the questions that brought me here, into the high glaciers of the Himalaya. Perhaps with death the veil will be lifted and the questions that crowd my mind will finally find answers. If so, my journey will not have been in vain...*

However the book of Vivek's life had not yet turned its last page, for a renunciant who lived in a nearby cave found him just in time. This Good Samaritan was as thin as a staff and his ribcage seemed to be working its way out of his chest. His hair was a nest of knots, though he wore it wrapped about his head with the dignity of someone in a turban. The long beard hung to his waist, and his skin was as brown and dry as toughened leather.

Despite his fragile appearance, the good man hauled the youth onto his back like a bag of grain and briskly toted him to the cave where he lived. There he laid the dying young man, down by the hearth, and set about lighting a small fire. It took Vivek three days to recover, and for three days the ascetic never left his side.

When Vivek awoke, the first thing he saw was a pair of kind eyes watching over him in the light of a waning moon, and a smile that invited him to trust. Three more days passed before he had fully recuperated.

He decided to tell the man his story and the reasons he spent the night out in the mountain air. He spoke to him of the questions that had overpowered him; of how the blind man in the shrine had suggested a pilgrimage to the sources of the three sacred rivers; and of how, after drinking the water of the Ganges and reciting the sacred invocation, he had fallen unconscious on the ice.

"The experience was amazing," Vivek said, "but it only lasted an instant and then I lost consciousness. Actually, I don't know if I really lived it or if it was just a dream. Whether dream or reality, my heart longs to experience it again. Now that I've drawn the veil for

an instant, nothing will stop me until I've removed it, until I can be completely naked from this body that binds me to the material world."

"And how do you expect to achieve that?" asked the man. He poured water into a pot of used tea leaves, which would only afford aroma and colour to one with the patience to wait.

Vivek paused while the ascetic set the pot on the embers, awaiting his full attention. "The old man of the temple spoke to me about three sources. I have visited two and, through this, have learned the true meaning of maya. At the third I hope to obtain the knowledge that allows me to dissolve the mirage completely and remain in ecstasy forever. The only problem is that this river is Sarasvati, and no-one knows for sure where it is. According to the Scriptures, it was the most sacred of the seven rivers of antiquity. Perhaps it no longer exists. Some say it dried up a long time ago. Others say it's actually a subterranean river that flows into the Ganges and Yamuna near Allahabad."

The hermit poured tea into two small fired clay pots while he recited a short invocation to the God Shiva. Vivek watched while the drink was being served, then continued. "When I ask where to find the source of this supposed subterranean river, they say that it's ethereal, that it's a spiritual river which does not exist here, in the physical realm. Some answers are even more enigmatic; some even go as far as to say that to feel the flow of Sarasvati, one must be able to breathe through both nostrils at once. 'Activating *Sushumna*', they call it. Lunatics!" he said. "I'm looking for a river I can drink from. A real river, to draw its origin. Not a dry river, an ethereal river—or a river that flows down my spine."

The ascetic watched him and listened to his impassioned words with the look of someone who no longer seeks for answers. Then, suddenly, the man swept his beard aside, got up, and walked out of

the cave. Vivek wondered whether he had gone too far. These mountain folk aren't used to people grumbling, he thought.

Ashamed, Vivek decided to leave the cave and sit next to the hermit, who was perched on a rock overlooking the magnificent mountain range. When he had seated himself by his side, the ascetic asked, "What did you learn after drinking from the first source?"

"That reality is a mirage," Vivek replied timidly.

"And from the second?"

"That this mirage is made manifest by the power of the mind."

"Which means...?"

Vivek looked at him. "It means that everything is possible."

"If everything is possible, why do you deny the answers that were given to you? The fact that they do not serve you in achieving your goals, or that they don't live up to your expectations, does not mean that they are false. In fact, all three of them are true. But I know well that you are seeking a fourth answer. An answer that allows you to recover what you lived for an instant. You are waiting for the third source to give you the technique. What I don't know is whether you will be able to interpret its message once you drink its water..."

The man paused, and gazing towards the east, he continued. "Yes. The Sarasvati River also exists on the physical plane and you can drink from its waters. It is no longer the majestic river of antiquity because long ago an earthquake cut it off almost at its source and now its currents flow into the Ganges. Nowadays, it is a small tributary that springs not far from here, losing itself at the foot of the cave where the great wise man, Vyasa compiled the Vedas and composed the Mahabharata. Someday it will be a great

river once more—the day we discover that Sarasvati is also a river we must awaken inside.”

“Oh, baba, please tell me where to find it!” cried the young man.

“You will have to undergo a dangerous journey through glaciers and mountain passes at heights so great that there will be little air to breathe. Here you will encounter strong, cold winds, and you will find nowhere to take refuge. Your only companions will be small herds of wild blue goats; like them, you might end up the prey of the snow leopard. You will fight your way to the roof of the world, where the *Devas* (demigods) reside, but not even they will be able to help you, for this is an adventure you must undertake on your own.”

“How can I get there?” Vivek wanted to set off at once.

“First, you must venture south, following the glacier, until you reach the Tapovan plateau. Then, you will walk a *yodjana*<sup>16</sup> towards the east, skirting the glaciers, until you stumble upon the Vasuki Tal Lake. Keep walking a second *yodjana* in the same direction until you reach Kalindi Khal, known as the Path of the Sun Star. Cross it and continue a third *yodjana* towards the east until you reach a river. This river is the Arwa Nala, a tributary of the Sarasvati you are so eagerly looking for. Walk along its course and after a fourth *yodjana* you will arrive at the Sarasvati. Continue for a fifth *yodjana* upriver along its course towards the north and you will reach the glacier that gives birth to it. Five *yodjanas* then separate you from the answers you seek, but these last five *yodjanas* might cost you your life. Are you willing to undergo such an adventure?”

“Yes,” replied Vivek.

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<sup>16</sup> Measure of distance used in ancient times equal to approximately 15 kilometres.

The next day, Vivek and the hermit bid goodbye with a heartfelt embrace. The young man returned to the tiny village of Gangotri to gather the necessary provisions before setting off in search of the Sarasvati. Once Vivek had spent all his mendicant savings on a pair of good shoes, a second blanket, and supplies, he left in search of the mysterious river.

After two weeks of traversing perilous glaciers, prairies and mountain passes, Vivek finally reached his sought-after destination. He made haste to the point where the crystal clear water snaked its way from under the glacier; he repeated the invocation three times, and then submerged his hands. When Vivek drew them from the stream; however, he noticed that his palms could not retain the water. In fact, there was no sensation at all—no wetness, no cold; it was as though the water was nothing but a product of his imagination, a projection of his mind. “Why, why, oh Saraswati, do you deny me the answer that my heart so longs for?” he yelled into the echoing sky.

Now without supplies, and worse still, without the strength to continue his search, Vivek collapsed onto the snow, willing the cold of the coming night to snatch his life away.

A small walking caravan of *marchas*, a semi-nomadic tribe that lived in the region, came across the man who, for the second time that month, lay half-dead on the snow. This party had come from the cold lands of *Bhot*, now known as Tibet. There they had acquired a load of wool, which they intended to sell in the lower valleys. When they discovered Vivek’s condition, they quickly built a palanquin of sorts, wrapped him in yak skins, and made him hot tea with butter. A few days later, the group arrived in the village of Mana. Here Vivek was given a bed to stay in until he had fully recovered. When he finally came out of his trance, the rainy season had already begun, and he realised that this would make his return

journey difficult. He decided that he would spend the summer with those kind-faced people, and continue his journey down the mountain once autumn arrived.

Mountain folk were well-known for their hospitality and these people were no exception. The chief of the clan had welcomed him as a member of the family, and had given him his children's room to stay in. Theirs was a house with a low ceiling and small doors that he had to crouch to get through. It was made of stone and adobe mixed with cow dung, a dwelling that invited humility, in contrast with the high peaks that surrounded them. Vivek was amazed to think that for six months of the year these tiny houses were completely covered in snow. When their proprietors arrived in the spring, after spending the winter in slightly warmer lands, they always found them intact. It was as if the thick mantle of snow, which had completely covered them during the long cold months was nothing but a gentle caress.

The answer to Vivek's dilemma came to him a few days later. One morning, while the young man and his host enjoyed traditional *tsampa*, a drink made of tea, butter and rye, Vivek gave an account of his adventures. "...So much effort to reach the third source, and when I arrived there, I couldn't even taste its water."

"But no one can take away your experience," replied the chief.

"Yes, but what use is it to me now?"

### ✚ Legend of the Avalanches ✚<sup>17</sup>

"Experiences are always good for something," replied the man. "The first time my people arrived in this valley, we built the village at the foot of the great plateau that lies at the other side of the river. It seemed the ideal place because of the relatively flat, ample

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<sup>17</sup> Explained to the author by Mr Pitember, chief of the village of Mana, in 2004.

terrain that looked to be protected from avalanches. But when we returned from a long winter in the lower valleys, we found that an avalanche had swept our village away.”

“How awful!” said Vivek.

“Yes, but from that experience we learned that it was not possible to escape from avalanches; rather, we had to learn to live with them. Of course, to be able to live with someone, you must first get to know their habits. That’s why our ancestors thought it better to change the location of the village. Instead of choosing the most logical place, they decided to rebuild it on this side of the river, at the foot of the mountain.”

“Wasn’t this even more risky?” asked Vivek.

“No, because they reasoned that, as it was on a slope, avalanches would follow predetermined routes along the natural contours of the mountain. In the valley, while there was less probability of an avalanche, if there was one, there would be no way to predict its path. When an avalanche reaches the valley, it spreads out across the whole terrain. That’s why, that year they didn’t build any houses but instead planted stakes throughout the grounds where they were planning to build the new village.”

“Stakes?”

“Yes, so that the following spring they could proceed as follows: where a stake was still stuck fast in the ground, they built a house; but where the stakes had been knocked down by the snow, they made streets and esplanades. Since then, we have never again had a problem with avalanches, because we learned to respect their paths, and in fact, have come to share them. Avalanches pass by in the winter, we pass by in the summer, and meanwhile, our houses remain intact.”

“Very sensible.”

“Yes, but you, on the other hand, seem to want to flee from what you call *maya*, instead of learning to share its same path. Apparently, you want to evade it instead of studying how it operates and thus allowing it to not affect you. You almost departed from this life twice trying to avoid it. Perhaps you need to learn to live with it, because accepting it is surely the first step towards being able to transcend it.”

...✚...

## ✚ The Dream

THAT NIGHT THE young man decided to sleep out in the open, in the highest of the three caves that yawned above the tiny village. These caves were little more than natural shelters formed of large fallen rocks. They provided a roof over one's head and enough space to take refuge from the snow, but they were not adequate to protect one from the rigours of winter. As the wind was not blowing on this summer's night, Vivek thought it a good opportunity to set up a bivouac, instead of returning to the chief's house, where he didn't have much privacy.

When he fell asleep, Vivek began to dream. This was no ordinary dream, for it transported him to a time long past, to an event that had occurred in this same place thousands of years before.

“Ganesha, did you write down everything I told you?” said a voice that Vivek could not identify. “Ganesha, we have not walked so many days to find this solitary place, for you to take a nap halfway through the story.” The speaker was clearly irritated. “The body of Krishna is dead, the Age of Kali is approaching. If we don't write down what, until now, has simply been remembered, all the knowledge of our wise ones will be lost in the commotion that is to

come. If we don't leave a written legacy, no one will remember that once, Krishna walked this blessed land and, in his eternal wisdom, he reminded us of the true science of yoga, the science of union with the Divine principle. Please, write: 'Supreme Consciousness does not make us act against our own will, nor is it the cause of identifications with our own actions, nor does it cause us to become attached to the fruits of those actions. The origin of these three identifications is, on the other hand, the illusory nature of the reality that surrounds us.'"<sup>18</sup>

*It is the old man from the shrine of the Goddess Saraswati! Vivek thought to himself. It is not him physically, but I can sense that it is him in spirit. Why is he asking me to continue writing this story? Am I dreaming? What's happening to me? Am I remembering, or am I imagining all this?*

"Ganesha, my child, scribe and witness of this future time of darkness, your name has been given to you in honour of the elephant god, the one who removes obstacles from our path," continued the voice. "Your writing instrument is the ivory tusk we hope will serve to remove the obstacles of an age that is just beginning. This place, where my words are transcribed, has not been inhabited for the last hundred cycles because it was completely covered by the snow of a long ice age. It is like a blank page, without words telling of its past. I urge you to write, my child, so that when this age reaches its end we can remember all the wisdom our human race has amassed, and so that we are not utterly devoured by the ignorance of the difficult times ahead."

*What difficult times could he be talking about?* Vivek wondered.

"The times when we shall wrongly interpret the wisdom of the past," answered the voice. "Out of the four personalities that

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<sup>18</sup> Fragment inspired in the Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter V, verse 14.

Manu<sup>19</sup> defined for us, and upon that which our society has been built, they will make groups to which people belong by heritage, not by tendency.<sup>20</sup> It will be as if spirituality was transmitted through bloodlines instead of resulting from the combination of personal effort and divine grace. The four personalities will also be arranged in a hierarchy. Some will be considered to be above others, as though a person's head were more important than their chest or hands. Marriage will become a fixed contract to preserve the purity of blood, as if purity is linked to the physical body instead of being found in the soul (*Atman*). Of karma, or the cause-effect law, they will make an excuse to justify the splitting of a society that is about to lose its harmony, and conflict will rule again, and with it, war and division."

*He is describing our society now, Vivek thought.*

"In the Age of Kali, many people will mistake the material for the spiritual, focusing exclusively on the first at the expense of the second," continued the voice. "Stones will be given more value than people; governors will be corrupt; and merchants will flaunt their power. This is why you must write, my child, write with the hope that at least a few shall understand and preserve Eternal Truth. Write so that those who do not fixate on external objects might enjoy the happiness that flows from the inner Being."

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<sup>19</sup> In Hindu mythology, Manu is the name of the first king that ruled on Earth after the Great Deluge. He could be considered equivalent to Noah from the Torah and the Bible, Manco Capac from the Inca legend, or Deucalion from Greek mythology.

<sup>20</sup> He is referring to the caste system defined by Manu, which originally was not hereditary.

## 🐼 The Return

THOSE WORDS OF premonition were still resonating in Vivek's mind when he finally returned home a few months later. His mother embraced him for such a long time that he thought she would never let go. His father acted as though nothing had happened, but secretly looked at his son from time to time with a proud new light in his eyes. After greeting his parents, family members, and those neighbours that had come to visit their home, drawn by the news of his return, the young man went straight to the shrine of the Goddess Saraswati. Here he hoped to find the man responsible for his long adventure, the only person who seemed to have an answer to the dilemma of the third fountain.

"Master, master!" Vivek called when he saw him.

The man was seated in the same position that he had been in when Vivek had left him, as if time had stood still inside the shrine. When he heard his voice, the wise man gave a hint of a smile, and Vivek touched his feet as a sign of respect.

After they had greeted one another, the young man said, "Master, from the first source I learned that mountains, rivers, valleys, and all the things that surround us are not real, but an illusion. This material world is a mirage when one observes it through the eyes of Consciousness. From the second of the sources I learned that reality is actually Brahman, or Supreme Consciousness. When one transcends the mind, reality is presented as One and Absolute. But tell me, please, what have I learned of the third fountain?"

The old man motioned with his staff for Vivek to come and sit by his side. With his serene smile ever-present, he replied, "Of the third fountain you have learned three things. Firstly, you came to see that knowledge is also an illusion, as unreal as the water of the

source. Therefore, you must not seek, by accumulating it, a formula that will enable you to recover the instant of ecstasy that drinking from the source of the Ganges gave you; for hoarding knowledge will only inflate your ego and push you from your objective. Don't forget that more valuable than reading knowledge, or having it explained to you, is to remember it, to remember the Eternal Truths. But know also that this is a journey to be undertaken with humility."

"What do you mean, master?"

"It is like a stick of incense. If you do not hold the incense to the flame long enough for the wood at its core to catch, the stick will never burn. But, on the other hand, if you don't extinguish the flame when it has caught, the incense will be consumed, and the fragrance shall be lost. The ego (*ahamkara*) acts in the same way. At first you need it, just as the fragrance needs the wooden stick to hold it, just as the incense needs the flame. The ego is necessary so that one might become conscious of one's individuality and capacity to act. But after this, you need to detach from it, so you can give off your own fragrance. Once the flame is extinguished, your life will go by steadily in the same way that the stick is consumed, and the fragrance you give off will linger. Then, eventually, you will dissolve, to mingle with the many that burned before you. Do you understand now?"

"Yes."

"Secondly, you have obtained the faith that is born out of experience (*sraddha*). It is a faith that gave you the strength to venture out alone in the snow in search of the third fountain. It is not a blind faith; rather, it is certainty born of having glimpsed the light for an instant to discover that ecstasy is the natural state of the soul. This is why you accepted the challenge when the master, incarnate in the body of a baba at the foot of the glacier of

Gaumukh, proposed you take a dangerous trek to the source of the Sarasvati; because, from your first two experiences, you obtained this faith.”

The young man nodded and a smile came to his face as he realised that this small, dry man of Sarasvati’s shrine, had not only manifested as the wise Vyasa of his dream, but that he was also the baba who had rescued him in Gaumukh.

“Finally, you have demonstrated the physical and mental strength (*virya*) needed to reach your objective. You shall need the same willpower and determination to overcome the multiple obstacles that separate you from the supreme experience.”

“Master, as you say, I have learned many things, but now that I have tasted the sweetness of the supreme experience, I lack the will to continue living in this illusory reality.”

“Who says it’s illusory!?” said the man. “Didn’t you learn with the example of the avalanches that you need to come to a place where you can coexist with what you call maya?”

Vivek decided not to ask how the master also knew about the conversation he had held with the chief of the small village of Mana. He thought that this would be underestimating the abilities of those who are not subject to the limitations of time and space. Instead, he replied with a new question. “Yes, but how?”

“Primary, by ceasing to consider the reality around you a mirage. For, like avalanches, if you deny its existence, it will inevitably cover you and you will lose your sense of direction. Once you stop denying it, you will be ready to understand how it works, and once you know this, you will be able to transcend it.”

“But how does it operate?”

“The Ultimate Reality—that which you perceived in the rapture of an instant—is One and Absolute. How the singular is transformed into multiplicity and how this multiplicity operates is what you need to learn. But to find your way through the multiplicity of apparent reality, you need to determine and distinguish all the possible directions you can take. That is why I am asking you: how many possible directions do you think define this apparent reality?”

“Four,” replied the young man.

“Four! Are you sure? Don’t let the horizon that limits your gaze betray you and don’t mistake as directions, those ways that you can only walk along. In my blindness and lameness, I see more.”

“Six, if we think of up and down as possible directions, but these are not directions that define a horizon, or that I can move along.”

“But nevertheless you moved along them in your first experience, when you rose towards the sky. Initially you denied the apparent reality that surrounds you. Now you don’t deny it, but you limit it. Neither one option, nor the other, will allow you to transcend it. It is true that up and down define directions of a different nature in comparison to the four cardinal directions, but even so, they are directions with their own concept of horizon and with their own way for one to move along them.”

The master paused to undo and rewrap the bow of hair he wore as a turban, and then continued:

“However, you have missed the seventh direction: the point towards your interior. When you set out in this direction, you will discover that reality as it surrounds us is pure vibration, pure sound. Then, you shall recover the experience of communion with Supreme Consciousness, for it has never left you. Do not look for it at the source of the external Sarasvati River; instead seek it at the

source of the river that flows within. This is what they call *sushumna*, the energy channel that moves between *ida* and *pingala*, the lunar and solar channels. The *ida* and *pingala* channels (*nadis*) are also known by the names of Ganges and Yamuna.”

The old man started to hum a soft melody. A few moments later, his humming ceased. He was smiling, and Vivek knew that the man had again entered *samadhi*, the state of absolute ecstasy. The young man had no more questions. He crossed his legs, closed his eyes, and sought to follow the blind man’s lead on his own inner journey.

# Water



## \_\_\_ 2. The Seven Stages of Love \_\_\_



*She hails from the Tropic of Cancer;  
she was born in a sandy and arid land  
where her kin lived  
from the few wellsprings of water.*

*This is a place where humanity gathered,  
to build the great cities of old;  
here the rivers of nomadism  
formed their first pools  
after the Great Deluge.*



## 🕉️ The Seven Circumambulations

OF ALL THE moments in Fatima's day, she most impatiently awaited that time when she would sit on her grandfather's lap and he would take her on a journey. Together, they visited lands accessible only to the most adventurous travellers, lands given life by the child's imagination. They would range past the bounds of the city walls; away from the narrow streets of the *medina* which she walked with her playmates every day; beyond the arid horizon and the distance covered by the flash and rumble of storms; and far away from the tracks marked by the caravans that came to the city each day.

This journey always began after the *Asr*, the third prayer of the day. Fatima would sit on the big rock under the household fig tree, waiting for her grandfather to finish his prayers, roll up his mat, and come to sit by her side. Then he would take the girl under her arms and lift her onto his lap. To Fatima, this was like mounting a horse. Her grandfather's galloping words would carry her through unknown places: places yet to be visited by her imagination.

Each of these journeys began with Fatima asking her grandfather a question, for she knew that this would always prompt the old man to lift her onto his lap. She would utter a new one each time the gallop of his words slowed; her questions were like urging whips on a horse's back.

"So tell me, grandfather," she said on this occasion, "why do pilgrims walk seven times around the *Kaaba*?"<sup>21</sup>

The old man lifted her onto his knee. "The prophet Abraham set up the rite of the seven circumambulations (*tawaf*), and it was put

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<sup>21</sup>A sacred monolith of unknown origin located in the city of Mecca, which was already a destination for pilgrimage in pre-Islamic times.

in place again by the prophet Muhammad, because we had forgotten it,” he replied, adding, “Peace be upon them both.”

“But grandfather, why seven times?”

The man knew that a child’s curiosity couldn’t be satisfied with a short answer, and that any answer he might give would open up a new question in her eager mind. To provide a response, he would have to touch upon the esoteric branch of Islam, which would lead them along paths too metaphysical for her young mind, so he simply replied, “It’s because there are seven stages (*maqams*) that must be crossed to reach spiritual transformation. The pilgrim tries to pass through each of the stages with every successive circuit, to, little by little, draw nearer to The Omnipresent.

That day Fatima did not ask any more questions, but instead began to imagine the great black stone of the Kaaba as a staircase with God sitting on the top and the pilgrims climbing towards him, reciting prayers. She thought of the *hajj*, believers who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca, as men and women who had returned sanctified after a long journey.

This would become her idealised vision of the pilgrims, until the day her own father would come back as a *hajji* himself. On that day, Fatima would come to suspect that something was amiss in her childish interpretation of pilgrimage.

## ☪ Picking up an Old Conversation

THE YEARS PASSED BY. Fatima, now a woman, had become aware of human imperfections, passions, and tendencies that move empires, and spur humanity to war. It was the month of Ramadan of the year 636 of *Hijra* (year 1239 in the Gregorian calendar), and it was starting to get hot. The year before, Mongols had begun

incursions into the Caliphate territory, but Baghdad still seemed safe.

The passions that Fatima observed in the political realm seemed to her the same as those that dominated her father's relationship with his four wives, a relationship based on jealousy and distrust. Nothing had changed after the man had returned from Mecca. The father had not become the grandfather. The worldly man had not become a saint. For this reason, she decided to pick up a conversation that had been interrupted a while back; a conversation that had begun during a childhood journey. For this question she sought out her grandfather.

"Fatima," he replied, "you should know that not all the passions of our small self (*nafs*)<sup>22</sup> are completely subjugated with the pilgrimage to Mecca. Reaching the Supreme One requires more than a journey and seven circumambulations."

"But then, grandfather, why did the Prophet establish the pilgrimage to Mecca if it doesn't fully relieve us from our afflictions?"

#### ✦ Allegory of the *Ummah* ✦

"Try imagining the community of believers as an immense ocean. This is the ocean of the *Ummah*," he began. "Each of the five daily prayers creates an undulation, a wave that begins in the east with the first prayer of the morning, and travels from minaret to minaret, from town to town, towards the west. This wave is raised five times a day, starting at the mosque of Muchiri, the City of Broken Lips, and heading towards the doors of the great mosque of Cordoba. By the time the first wave reaches its destination,

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<sup>22</sup> The *nafs* or small self corresponds approximately to the modern concept of ego or lower self.

another begins in the east with the second prayer of the day, so the ocean is perpetually moving.”

While the old man spoke, he stood from his seat on the block of stone and began moving his hands to represent the undulations created by prayer on that ocean of believers. Fatima watched him from her seat under the fig tree—that same tree of her childhood, which was now twice the size and had triple the fruit. The man returned to his seat next to Fatima and waited; he knew she would have yet another question ready for him.

“I understand why we must pray five times,” she said, “but why do we have to face Mecca, and why must we journey there at least once in our lifetime?”

“Just as prayer produces the five waves that cross the ocean of believers each day, praying with your face to Mecca and going to visit it at least once in your lifetime causes another effect in the ocean of the *Ummah*—a whirlpool,” he replied. “This whirlpool has its epicentre in the Holy City, and the seven circumambulations to the Kaaba are the waters that draw closer to the place where the presence of The All-Glorious is manifested with greatest intensity. These tribes of Bedouin nomads needed to quench their spiritual thirst; they needed the water that nourished their soul. The Prophet, peace be upon him, brought us this water, and since then our spirit has not been thirsty. Pilgrimage is important because it creates movement; it allows the community of believers to get to know each other; and it made it possible for those who, generations ago, fought in continuous tribal conflicts, to come to a place where they can now share the same table and eat from the same plate.”

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“So, grandfather,” said Fatima, “if the seven circumambulations to the Kaaba bring us near to The Creator, but doesn’t guarantee

that mercy and love will definitely take root in our hearts, how can we reach The All Powerful?"

"Whoever has pure intentions and sincere aspirations may reach Him by crossing the seven stages of love, which are symbolically represented by the seven circumambulations. Only when we have a pure heart may we come near to The Majestic One. This is the path of the mystic, the romance between the sincere believer and the unconditional love of The All-Compassionate."

"What are these seven stages of love? Please tell me; my heart has yearned for reunion for so long."

### 🕉️ **The Attachment of the Small Self**

FATIMA HAD RESUMED a conversation postponed for many years. Once again, she sought to delve into the esoteric branches of Islam. When she was a child her grandfather had taken her onto his lap, but now she sat by his side as a woman. She is ready to understand, he thought.

"The seven stages are determined by their degree of intensity. So, in the first three we cannot speak of love, but only attachment." He pointed to the spot just under the girl's navel. "This is the region of the body where the small self (*nafs*) resides."

Fatima gazed at the point to which her grandfather had indicated.<sup>23</sup> She took notice of, how in the past, when her will felt strong and her energy levels high, this area seemed energised. When she felt depressed, powerless and without will, however, the area around her navel seemed to lack strength. “What do you mean by attachment?” she asked.

“Attachment means to love, not because we wish well to whom or what we love, but because we are trying to satisfy the longing and desires of our small self,” he replied.

“Attachment—but to what, grandfather?”

“We can become attached to three things. In the first place, to others.”

“Others?”

“Yes—both human beings and pets. That is, we cling to the feeling of wellbeing and security that their presence gives us, to the routine of having them nearby, or to the desire for some benefit they might bring to us.”

“What else can we become attached to?”

“Physical objects—material possessions; substances; the place we live in; and generally, everything that is material.”

“And the third thing?” she asked.

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<sup>23</sup> Some Sufi traditions locate the *nafs* between the eyebrows, whilst others locate it just below the navel. This double location has its origin in the double interpretation of *nafs*. To some schools, *nafs* constitute the entirety of human psychological processes, including the spiritual dimension. When interpreted in this way, it makes sense to locate the *nafs* between the eyebrows, in the energy centre of intuition. But to most Sufi traditions, *nafs* includes only the lower self—the self which has still not opened up to the spiritual dimension. In this second case, it makes more sense to place it just under the navel, where, according to Tantra, *Manipura Chakra* is located. This is the energy centre of will, where self-love resides. As the interpretation of *nafs* given in this book corresponds to the second case, the author has located it just below the navel.

“Ideas.”

“Ideas? How can we become attached to ideas if they’re not material?”

“Ideas form a part of the world of similitude (*Alam al-Mithal*). We hold on to them as much as we hold on to objects from the physical world (*Alam al-Ajsam*)—sometimes even more. The idea of good and evil, fair and unfair, of what’s lawful (*halal*) or forbidden (*haram*), and especially the image we have of ourselves—these are all concepts that we are very attached to. They are ideas that we interpret to suit ourselves, to satisfy the desires of our small self, or to dispel its fears.

“Can we also become attached to our birth land?”

“Yes, but in that case we’d be clinging to a combination of all three things. Firstly, we’d be attached to family and friends we’ve left behind. We’d also be attached to the objects that make up both the natural environment, with its rivers, valleys and mountains, and the environment created by human beings, with its buildings, streets and monuments. Finally, our attachment to ideas would include the culture and local customs, traditions, ways of doing things, or beliefs and superstitions.”

“And what about God, can we also become attached to The Finder?”

“We cannot become attached to The Everlasting One. We can only reach Him by love—never by attachment. But we can limit Him, to the point that one might identify God with an object; then one may become attached to this object. That is why the Prophet in his infinite wisdom, asked us to destroy all idols in our temples, so that The Hidden One would never be represented by images. He did this so that we might not become attached to those objects and thereby mistake them for The Self-Existing One.”

"I see," said Fatima.

"But we can become attached to the idea of God, an idea that we mistake for The All-Comprehending, turning what is Absolute and Infinite into something relative and limited. We see this in the idea of an avenging god who wants Holy War, or a god who distinguishes between believers and infidels, as if there were just one path to Him, who, by definition, symbolises all possible routes."

"Do you mean we can become attached to everything that is limited and relative, but not to God himself?"

"Yes."

"Now that I know the three types of things we can cling to, what are the three levels of attachment you were telling me about?" she asked.

"The first stage of attachment is the one born of habit and custom," replied the man. "We get used to living with someone, or enjoying an object, or the traditions of the place we live in, and we become attached in such a way that if the person leaves, the object disappears, or the traditions change, we feel an inner emptiness, as if something is missing from our lives. This is the attachment born of our need to feel safe."

Fatima knew very well what type of attachment her grandfather was talking about. She had seen how change produced anxiety in most people—changes in their home, health or profession; changes in the weather; in the political situation; in the material welfare of society; or in the traditions and ways of doing things. And, of course, in the ultimate change: death.

"Change produces uncertainty," said her grandfather, as though he had read her mind. "That's why we prefer what we know, to the promise of something better that we're not familiar with. We

complain about what we have, but if someone proposes we change it, we get nervous because we're frightened of uncertainty."

"Why, grandfather?"

"The small self in most people does not want to accept uncertainty. It does not want to acknowledge that everything is subject to the will of The Subtle One. The small self clings to people, objects, or ideas so that it might create for itself an illusion of permanence, of everything remaining the same. That's why each time we talk about a future intention, we Muslims say, 'God willing' (*Insha'Allah*); it's so we don't forget that everything is subject to His will."

"But grandfather, before, when we were nomads, we didn't have so many possessions and our lives were a lot simpler. Was our level of attachment less too?"

"As nomads, we could not accumulate many possessions because they needed to be transported. Therefore, we only kept the things that were truly necessary for preserving our way of life. Now, we build mansions and fill them with valuable objects; we surround ourselves with slaves to make our lives more comfortable; we design irrigation systems to facilitate agriculture; we build storage spaces to support the exchange of goods; we erect empires that take two hundred days to cross by caravan. Now that we are sedentary, we cling to many things. It is not to old traditions so much, because we have been modifying them as generations go by. We are no longer attached to our tribe or clan, because we have mixed our blood too. Now, we cling to the sumptuousness of our mansions; the beauty of their mosaics; the cleanliness of our public baths (*hammams*); the variety of our foods; the knowledge transmitted by books; the sophistication of our manners; our refined taste; and our honours and social titles. All

these constitute our new ties. They are ties that our small self identifies with.”

“You have spoken of three degrees of attachment, and said that habits and customs constitute the first one. Grandfather, what are the other two?”

“Attachment to customs or habits is intense, but even greater than this is the strength with which the small self clings to what it desires, or its stubbornness in trying to avoid what it rejects. While, in the first stage, we passively cling to things that were given to us and to customs we want to keep intact, in the second stage, we actively seek, long for, and desire attitudes that increase the strength of our ties.”

“Where does all this start?”

“With our small self, which we identify with, to the point where we believe we are also the object of our attachment.”

“I don’t understand.”

#### ✦ Parable of the Rich Merchant ✦

“You’ll see it more clearly with this story. They say a very rich merchant and a wandering ascetic met in the City of Jeddah, seaport and gateway to Mecca. Both men were on pilgrimage to the Holy City. The merchant had arrived on his ship, which was weighed down with all sorts of riches he had acquired along his journey—myrrh from Abyssinia, the land of the Habesha people; malachite from King Solomon’s mines in Palestine; jade and silk from the east; lapis lazuli extracted from Badakhshan; and amber from the north. These treasures were jam-packed, so that the ship could barely stay afloat. In contrast, the ascetic travelled barefoot, with nothing more than a wool tunic to cover his body.

“‘Why are you carrying all those riches?’ the ascetic asked the merchant.

“‘To sell once I’m back, as I’ve invested my entire fortune in them,’ he replied.

“‘And if, on the day of the Final Judgement, The Forbearing opens the doors of Paradise to you, do you expect to arrive with all your earthly possessions—or will you be prepared to leave them behind?’ the ascetic asked.

“‘If The Just promises me Paradise,’ responded the merchant, ‘then I am willing to renounce them all. For I have been told there is no treasure that can compare to the Garden of Allah.’

“‘God willing,’ replied the ascetic, ‘because, as the Prophet said, “one must die before dying,” which means we must let go of all that ties us to this earthly existence. Paradise is not a port at which you can anchor the boat of avarice. Just as you are now forced to anchor your ship of treasure here in Jeddah and continue your journey on foot, the day when The Hearer of All calls you, you will have to leave it all behind. You will not even be allowed to wear a woollen tunic like mine. But tell me, do you not think that when the day comes, it will be easier for me to rid myself of my tunic than it will be for you to renounce all the possessions you think you need?’”

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The old man’s story was followed by silence, a silence in which Fatima tried to absorb his words. Now that she understood the first two stages—the first two circumambulations of the Kaaba—she wanted to continue on her journey around the great Sacred Stone. She had waited many years for this—since that first conversation in childhood.

Her grandfather saw the appeal in her eyes, a longing that only years and experience would appease.

“After clinging, firstly out of habit, and secondly for desire, what is the third degree of attachment?” she asked.

“Do you remember I said we can become attached to three things—people, objects, and ideas?”

“Yes.”

“Well, in the third degree, we become attached to our small self. In our small self, the three things—people, objects, and ideas—are combined in a single state of attachment. The subject we cling to is our small self, and the object our body; then there is the idea that we cling to: the image we have formed of ourselves. We identify with these, forgetting that, in reality, we are the Eternal Spirit (*Ruh*). Because it is so difficult to separate our body from our small self, our small self from the idea that we’ve formed of ourselves, and the idea from the objects that identify us, this third represents the most intense degree of attachment.”

“What do you mean by the idea of ourselves?” asked Fatima.

#### ✦ Parable of the Orthodox Monarch ✦

“I’ll tell you another story so you’ll understand. There was once a monarch who boasted of being a virtuous believer and, to help his subjects along the path of righteousness, he decided to forbid music, making it *haraam*. His decision was based on the argument that music was against the Scriptures and harmful to the soul. With the new decree, he authorised his soldiers to reprimand musicians and burn their instruments, driving them to mendicity. After the decree, nobody dared sing verses that weren’t contained in the sacred book. Even these, they recited shyly, without making use of

the plasticity, rhythmic beauty, and melodious sounds of our language.

“In this same kingdom,” he said, “there also lived an ascetic whose fame had reached the monarch. He was a marabout, and people said of him that he spent all hours of the day in contemplation. And so, the monarch decided to summon this ascetic to court, for he wanted to measure the man’s degree of sanctity. Aware that he could not reject the dignitary’s invitation without offending him, the marabout accepted his request.”

Fatima could not take her eyes from her grandfather’s face and gestures; his words were the only sounds she could hear. She listened to him as though memorising every detail.

“After dining, the guests relaxed for a snooze. It was then that the people of the court heard a melody drifting through the hall, but no one could say where it came from. Deeply offended, the monarch stood and snarled at his guests, ‘Have I not forbidden music! Who dares to play in the palace?’

“This was the music that flowed from the heart of the ascetic, for he was lying in contemplation in a corner of the grand hall. He sat up and answered the monarch then, saying, ‘God is the musician; I am just his instrument.’

“*Giza-i Ruh*,” said the grandfather, closing his story, “music is food for the soul. To forbid music is to starve the soul to death.”

“But if music is food for the soul, why did the monarch forbid it?” asked Fatima.

“He didn’t feel confident in his abilities as a ruler, and so the musicians satirised him with songs that emphasised his ineptitude. This is why he distorted the concept of *haraam*, forbidding something that had always been *halal* and therefore allowed by the Law of God. The monarch was too attached to the idea he had of

himself—to his image of rectitude and orthodoxy—to his own small self.”

“Did this really happen?” asked the girl.

“If it hasn’t happened yet, it will, especially to the degree that the revelations transmitted by the Prophet, peace be upon him, are forgotten, and we cling to a deformed idea of his true message.<sup>24</sup>”

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### 🕌 The Love of the Heart

THE CONVERSATION was interrupted by Fatima’s father, who had just returned from the market where he had been attempting to sell a horse of mixed breed as a pure blood. Annoyed about his failure, he yelled at his wives and the household slaves to release his frustration. The horse was taken to the stable, and when silence governed the inner patio of the house once more, the grandfather decided to continue.

“Fatima, I have spoken to you of the first three stages, based on the attachment of our small self, but you must know that the three following stages emanate, not from the inner self, but from the heart (*Qalb*).” He pointed to the left side of her chest.<sup>25</sup> “In these stages we can speak of true love.”

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<sup>24</sup> It happened four centuries later, during the rule of Emperor Aurangzeb in India during the Mogul Empire.

<sup>25</sup> This is where, according to esoteric Islam, the heart energy centre (*Latifat al-Qalbi*) is located. Many other traditions have spoken about this energy centre, which emanates compassion and love for others. Tantra calls it Heart Chakra (*Anahata*), Kabbalists name it *Tiferet*, and Christians identify it as the Sacred Heart of Jesus, while to Taoists, it’s the intermediate *Dan Tien* and to Andean priests it’s the *Sonqo Nawi*.”

"True love? Oh grandfather, what are these other stages? Please tell me more!"

"First, there is love with acceptance, which is the foundation for a relationship of equality between lovers. This moves beyond the selfish attraction subordinated to the will of the small self that distinguishes the first two stages; and it is greater than self-love, which I explained was the pinnacle of the third. It's the kind of love that comes, not from habit, or from the impulse to satisfy our desires, or from considering ourselves first, before others, but from accepting our loved ones just as they are, without trying to change them, and without making them adjust to an ideal or to our own expectations."

"Can we also feel this kind of love towards objects or ideas?" she asked.

"Just as we can become attached to everything that is relative, such as objects, people or ideas, but not to The Clement because He is Absolute, true love, coming from the heart, and can only be felt for those who also have a heart. This might be animals, humans, or celestial beings. We can, however, love an object or an idea indirectly; inasmuch as it links us to the person we love. That is to say, we can love objects for what they symbolise, not for what they really are."

"I don't understand."

#### ✦ Legend of the Woman and the Necklace ✦

"Perhaps this story will help you. While the Prophet still lived, peace be upon him, many of his followers had to fight to defend the faith and their lives. One of the soldiers of the new faith was a young man who gave a necklace to his wife before departing to the battlefield. He said to her, 'While I am gone, love this necklace as you love me, for its touch at your neck will remind you of my

caresses, and the strength of its gold around your breast will be like the firmness of my embrace.' She put the necklace on and never took it off, not even when she went to sleep, because she never wanted to lose touch with her beloved. Then, one day, she was told that her husband had died in combat. When she heard this, she removed the necklace and cast it to the ground, never to wear it again.

"Why do you throw away the gift of your husband, if you loved him so much?" the people asked.

"If it's true that those who die for a just cause are united with The Light, it no longer makes sense to wear the necklace. For from now on, each time I feel the breeze brush my skin I will feel the caress of my beloved; each time water slides down my body I will feel his embraces; each time the Sun warms me I will feel his presence; and each time I step on the ground I will feel the firmness and support of his words."

"The necklace was precious only inasmuch as it linked her to her beloved," said Fatima, satisfied that she'd understood.

"Yes, but only while he was alive, because when he died and became united with The All-Merciful, everything then reminded her of her beloved. That's why the Qur'an says about God, 'No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision.'<sup>26</sup> He can see from the eyes of every creature and that's why another of his names is The Seer of All."

After these words, grandfather and granddaughter remained in silence, their gaze fixed on the fig tree.

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<sup>26</sup> The Qur'an - Surat Al-'An'ām 6:103

*Love with acceptance, Fatima thought. How different from the love between my father and his wives...*

She still remembered a conversation that had taken place between her father and grandfather when she was barely in her teens. It was an argument she had overheard by accident while lying behind a bush not far from where the fig tree stood. The two men, sitting under the tree, had seemed visibly agitated. Her father had just met a dancer, and was announcing to her grandfather his intentions to marry her.

“Have you taken into account that you already have four women to support and that, as a good Muslim, you are obliged to treat them all equally?” said the older man.

“The Prophet, peace be upon him, had nine at one point,” replied the other.

“Yes, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, married for the second time after he was left a widower, and his subsequent marriages were contracted to ensure the wellbeing of the widows of Muslim brothers who had died defending the faith. They were not the product of a whim, nor were they based on seduction. A'isha was, in fact, the only one who had not been married before, and the Prophet married her because the archangel Gabriel asked him to.”

“Four women I have, and not one of them has been capable of giving me a male son. How can I expect our lineage to continue if all my descendants are female?”

“Qasim and 'Abdullah, sons of the Prophet, also died before leaving successors; but this has not been an inconvenience for the numerous families affirming they were linked to the lineage of Muhammad,” replied her grandfather, adding, “Peace be upon them all.”

“Have you no wish for descendants to give continuity to your name?” asked her father. “You, who have been married only once, and were left a widower with the birth of your only child.”

“If your actions are noble, you will not need sons to continue your lineage. With noble actions your lineage will be transmitted whether or not you have descendants of your own.”

*What lineage was grandfather referring to? Fatima wondered as she went over the details of that old conversation. If it is not the lineage of blood, perhaps it is the lineage of the word...*

In any case, the reasons that caused her to recall that conversation from her teens were related to a love based on acceptance, and which, just as her grandfather had said, represented the highest stage to be reached in romantic love.

The old man interrupted Fatima’s reverie by picking up a fig that had fallen to the ground, and offering to her saying, “Our heart is like this fig. The Sun ripens it, softens it, intensifies its fragrance, and makes it sweet on the inside. Once the fruit is ready, the slightest breath of air can make it fall to the ground. This ripening and making ready to be consumed, represents the entrance to the fourth stage; and the act of falling to the ground symbolises the fifth. This fifth stage is called, love with surrender.”

“Just like the fig, which surrenders its fruit when it has ripened!” Fatima cried.

“Exactly!” said he. “They say that Allah loves the one who serves all the creatures of Allah more than they serve themselves. True surrender begins when one offers oneself to all his creatures, and is united by this total surrender with The Nourisher. A true Muslim is he who surrenders to divine intention. Perhaps he does not know the Messenger of God, or any of the prophets who preceded him, such as Abraham, or Jesus, peace be upon them all. Perhaps he

has never had the opportunity to read any of the sacred books, or to visit a mosque. But if this devout person is capable of surrendering to the will of The Equitable One, he will be more Muslim than the most erudite of Imams. Surrender is in fact the culmination of the message transmitted by three prophets, who were born and lived in this arid land surrounded by five seas.”

“The culmination?” she asked.

“Abraham came first, to tell us there was only one God—everyone’s God. With time we went from the only God to the only true God. This is why Abraham’s followers ended up considering themselves the chosen ones. And because the chosen ones were persecuted, some of them made God their vindictive officer, who would avenge the injustices they’d suffered. So, then came Jesus, to remind us that God is neither cruel nor avenging; rather, he is the God of Love. He too made God everyone’s God. But with time, we ended up identifying The Hidden with idols, and we made The Absolute the god of those institutions that represented Him.

“Finally, came Muhammad,” said the man, “to remind us that we must surrender to the only God, the God of Love, not by using idols or institutions as intermediaries, but directly—through prayer, pilgrimage, service and compassion towards others. But his message was also distorted, and the God of Peace is now being used to make war. In all three of these cases, we are talking about the same God, the same message, with the only difference being the emphasis placed on a particular aspect of divinity. Do you understand?”

“Yes. But surely you have another story up your sleeve to explain the meaning of surrender to divine intention,” she said with a smile.

The old man sat quiet for a time, and then, drawing breath, he began his story.

## ✦ Fable of the Stagnant River ✦

“They say that the waters of a great river descended through mountain gorges, valleys, deserts, and plains, all the way to the sea. But at a point just before he joined with the vastness of the ocean, this river had formed an estuary surrounded by a swamp.

“‘What are you doing?’ the ocean asked the river when she saw the mire.

“‘I’m trying to preserve my identity,’ he replied. ‘That’s why I’ve been picking up soil and stones along my way and depositing them here, to form this estuary. It’s so that one day I’ll be able to keep my waters from being confused with your immensity.

“‘But don’t you see that, as a result, you’re forming a swamp of stagnant and foul waters?’ reproached the ocean. ‘If, on the other hand, you let yourself be carried away, blending into me, you will achieve much more than you ever dreamed. With the loss of your identity, you will be free, and your waters will extend the width and breadth of me.’”

...✦...

“But grandfather, if we are the river and the ocean is God, doesn’t this mean that love with surrender is only possible towards The Knower of All?” asked Fatima.

“Among human beings, there is only one relationship of love whose intensity can reach the fifth stage: the love of a mother towards her child. A mother who truly loves her children will not hesitate to sacrifice her life to preserve theirs. If she were asked, the answer would be immediate and would flow directly from her heart. In contrast, a father may also sacrifice his life if he were asked, but he would first use logical reasoning to answer, filtering his reply through his small self. The mother has carried her son in her womb. She has witnessed his body being formed, his soul

entering in the third month to give the first kick. With birth, the physical link is broken, but the emotional link will continue to exist forever and ever.”

“How may I surrender to The Divine One?”

“Through the practice of remembrance of Allah from the heart (*Zikr-e qalbi*). You must continuously remember God by constantly repeating His name or a fragment of a sacred book where He is mentioned. ‘Remember me, I will remember you,’ says the Holy Qur’an.<sup>27</sup>”

“I’ve tried that already, grandfather, but I keep losing my concentration and other thoughts distract me.”

“If you’ve been absorbed for some time remembering The Exalter, and you forget about what you’re doing and allow other thoughts to distract you, don’t worry—simply go back to remembering His name once again. And if, throughout one day, this happens to you a hundred times, be at peace, for the next day it will happen one time less; and on the following day, one time less still. It will be this way until, just as you forgot God at the beginning, the day will come when you will forget everything except for Him.”

“The fig falls, the river surrenders to the ocean, the mother to her child, or the devout person to God, and then...” said Fatima, eager to hear his description of the two final stages.

“Then comes rapture or mystic ecstasy (*wajad*). But to understand this ecstasy, you first need to grasp the relationship that exists between the first three stages of love—the ones involving the small self (*nafs*)—and the three following ones, which are linked to the heart (*Qalb*). This relationship might be compared

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<sup>27</sup> The Qur’an - *Al-Baqarah* 2:152

to the one between three musical notes located in one octave (*diwan*), and those same three notes, an octave higher.”

“Musical notes? Octaves?”

“Remember that music is not only food for the soul; it also constitutes the soul’s language. In this language, the first octave is occupied by the small self (*nafs*), the second by the heart (*Qalb*), and the highest by Spirit (*Ruh*). It’s a harmonious melody and in order for the devotee to leap from one octave to the next, they must first win the greater battle (*Jihad Akbar*).”

“What greater battle, grandfather?” asked the girl.

“When the Prophet, peace be upon him, returned from the battle against the tribes of Mecca he said, ‘We have moved from the lesser battle (*Jihad Asghar*) to the greater battle (*Jihad Akbar*).’

“‘Oh Prophet of God! What is this greater battle?’ asked his followers, to which he replied,

‘It is the battle against our own small self. This is the most obligatory of all battles’ (*Afrad al-Jihad*).<sup>28</sup> It is, in fact, the only true *Jihad*,” concluded the grandfather.

“Only those who win this greater battle enter the second octave,” said Fatima, satisfied that she’d understood.

“That’s right,” replied the man. “Do you remember how the first stage was attachment from habit? Well, this represents the first note in the first octave. It symbolises that stage in which we are attached out of habit to everything that surrounds us, be it people, objects, or ideas. Those who live in the first stage do not want change, because change brings uncertainty.”

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<sup>28</sup> Story told by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, an 11th century Sunni historian.

“So, when the Prophet, peace be upon him, found opposition to the new faith among the tribes of Mecca, it was because of resistance from those who were too attached to old ideas and who did not want to accept new ones,” she said, following the thread of her grandfather’s explanation.

“Exactly! And these are the same people who now want to make holy war against infidels to expand our faith,” he said. “On the other hand, those who vibrate from this same note, but an octave higher, live in love, with acceptance. From this fourth stage of love, they interpret events as the result of divine will and accept them, just as they accept others, and others’ faiths. This is not a passive acceptance based on apathy; rather, it results from an ability to appreciate the subtle link that joins and connects all events. Therefore, it is an acceptance of the present moment, but from the understanding that our current decisions affect the future. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“Following this same reasoning, in the second stage the small self becomes attached with even greater strength, because it desires. It has created a conscious link that makes it yearn with greater intensity. In contrast, people who live this same desire, but from the heart, surrender to divine will, which means...” he glanced at Fatima, urging her to finish his sentence.

“It means that all desires have been conquered, except the desire to reunite with God,” she said.

He smiled. “I see you understand.”

“And between the third and sixth stages, what relationship is there, grandfather?”

“In the third stage, the small self is attached to itself with the same intensity, because on this rests the image we have of

ourselves—and the one perceived by others. Those who live in the third stage think they are the centre of the universe, and that everything revolves around them. Conversely, when we finally transcend the small self, transmuting self-love into the love that encompasses everything, it means that we have opened up to rapture, or mystic ecstasy (*wajad*), which enables us to experience the entire universe within.”

“Perpetual ecstasy?”

“No,” he replied. “This is a transient spiritual state, a *hal*. To make mystic ecstasy permanent, we must reach full union (*fana’ fit tawhid*).”

“The seventh stage!” cried Fatima.

“Yes!” he replied, “The seventh stage represents the first note of the third octave, and may only be described through metaphor. On the other hand, the notes above cannot even be described metaphorically; nor can they be played by any instrument. They are the notes of angelic music which may only be perceived by those who live completely in Spirit.”

## 🕉️ The Union of Spirit

FATIMA'S GRANDFATHER ASKED her to follow him, and together they walked across the vast inner patio of the house. In the background they could hear the bustling street, although birdsong and the fluttering insects were more audible in the enclosed paradise. Grandfather and granddaughter walked in silence until, back at the foot of the fig tree, the man said, “See this tree? It has taken root between the rocks and the wall because its branches are weak and it needs a good base to sustain it. In the same way, to reach the seventh stage we need a strong Spirit to provide us with

those same foundations. Foundations are necessary, because the seventh stage does not flow from the small self (*nafs*) or from the heart (*Qalb*); rather, it flows directly from Spirit (*Ruh*)."

"Small self, heart, and Spirit—I get lost in so many concepts, grandfather; could you please clarify their meaning?" Fatima said.

### ✦ Myth About the Origin of Eclipses ✦

"Perhaps the following story will help you to understand them better," he replied. "They say God created the Moon to illuminate the night and the Sun to illuminate the day. They say it was that way from the beginning, but because the Moon was very jealous to see the Sun shining with more strength, he kept thinking:

"When it's the Sun who's shining, everyone opens their eyes, but when it's me, they go to sleep. When the Sun is in the firmament, the flowers bestow their fragrance, but when I'm there, they shut it away. When the Sun shows her face, the birds sing, but when I reveal mine, they are quiet..."

"Thus reasoned the Moon, until the day, tired of not being taken into consideration, he decided to eclipse the Sun so that everyone would see only him. But when he positioned himself between the Sun and all the creatures of the world, he noticed that a shroud of darkness covered the Earth. It was then that he realised he was just a reflection. Since that day, at regular intervals, the Moon has had the chance to eclipse the Sun so that he might never forget that it is not he who shines—but only reflects. Do you understand the meaning of the story?"

"Maybe it means that the Moon discovered he was sterile and that, without the Sun's fertility, life could not exist, in the same way that, without a woman's fertility, man cannot procreate," she said.

“Perhaps this is one of the possible interpretations, Fatima; but remember, myths usually have different meanings. Like layers of sediment hiding buried treasure, they are revealed little by little, as we become ready to understand them. Your interpretation is a first layer because it is tinted with cultural and idiomatic elements.”

“What do you mean, grandfather?”

“As you well know, we Arabs perceive the Sun as female and the Moon as male. There are some people, however, who believe that the Moon is female and that the Sun is male; and there are still others who do not assign to these any gender at all. To them, your interpretation wouldn’t make much sense. Therefore, you need to find a meaning that transcends all cultural connotations and, at the same time, helps us understand the concepts you asked to be explained.”

“Let me think,” she replied. “If the Moon does not shine with its own light but needs the Sun to illuminate darkness, wouldn’t it symbolise the small self, and the Sun represent Spirit, that is, our true essence?”

“Well done!”

“But then, what is the heart?” she asked.

“The heart is that place in which the battle between the small self and Spirit is won. It is the Earth with its night and its day. The night represents the material universe (*Alam al-Ajsam*), a reality where Spirit is reflected through our small self. Spirit is reflected, just as the Moon throws back the light from the Sun, illuminating the heart—but only in darkness. On the other hand, during the day of the soul, the light of consciousness reaches us directly at the heart, without being distorted by the small self. It is in this instant that we can perceive the essence of everything that surrounds us.”

...✚...

“How?” Fatima asked.

“By achieving spiritual ecstasy. When we reach the sixth stage, it is day for an instant, yet when this ecstasy fades, the polarity of the night rules again, and confusion takes us over once more. But when we reach the seventh stage, the Sun illuminates us forever.”<sup>29</sup>

“Describe this ecstasy, grandfather,” said the young woman.

“With ecstasy, our chest opens, allowing us to love everything and to take in everything we love. In that moment, we understand the simplicity of Creation. Tears flow from our eyes, and we say to ourselves, How can everything be so simple and at the same time so hard to understand? Then, we see that love is the strength that creates us and keeps us together. This realisation does not flow from the centre of our chest. Love flows from the chest, but understanding emanates from the point between the eyes. This point is called the Mysterious (*al-Khafi*)<sup>30</sup>; it is where the fog of duality dissipates.”

“Do you mean that, in the instant of ecstasy, we perceive directly, without needing the small self as our intermediary?”

“Yes. The heart is illuminated; the world is illuminated; it becomes daytime and we can contemplate light directly—no longer just its reflection. In that moment, we realise that we are not Moon, nor Earth, but Sun—the light that illuminates everything.

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<sup>29</sup> In Patanjali Yoga sutras this represents the difference between *savikalpa samādhi* (ecstasy with mental fluctuations) and *nirvikalpa samādhi* (ecstasy without mind).

<sup>30</sup> Also called the third eye or point of intuition and wisdom. In the Tantric tradition it is *Ajna* chakra; to Andean shamans it is *Uma Ñawi*; and in the *Sefirot* of the Kabbalah it is *Chokmah*.

## 🍌 The Ripe Fruit

FATIMA STILL REMEMBERED the last words of her grandfather: “You have to contemplate the face of the Sun directly, not just its reflection, to realise that you are its light.” Since that conversation, many years had gone by. Now, that girl was a woman in an elderly body, a woman who had been able to observe for herself the different spiritual stages.

She had come to appreciate how, in the infancy of the soul, the small self tries to find stability so that it might understand the world surrounding it. At this stage, the small self requires constancy, the assurance that tomorrow will be like today, and that there will be no surprises to face. Fatima had learned that, for this reason, we avoid change; we become attached to everything around us and create an illusion of permanence. As her grandfather had explained to her all those years ago, these were the qualities of the first spiritual stage.

Once we are used to our environment and our human condition, desires and longings start to arise, heralding our entrance into the second spiritual stage, the youth of the soul. This is when the small self sets out, looking for objects that will make life more comfortable; substances that will make it easier; people, so that it might be more entertaining; or concepts, to give it value. The small self turns objects into possessions, substances into addictions, people into attachments, and concepts into knowledge. When a desire has been satisfied, the small self substitutes it for another and then comes to yearn for an even greater object, a more potent substance, a more understanding person, or a more exciting concept.

It is within the small self’s nature to desire, to project itself into the future, and to preserve its integrity, rather than be satisfied with what it already has. Instead of giving itself to the present and

accepting that it is just a reflection of one's true essence, the small self pursues external fulfilment and is willing to do anything to satisfy its ambitions. Friends and foes are defined according to whether they help or hinder our objectives. We give to receive, help out of self-interest, and submit only to obtain what we're looking for. We base relationships on our own expectations and will not squander even a smile for people from whom we need nothing.

In its search to possess and enjoy, the small self then starts to identify with objects, substances, people, and concepts. This indicates one's entrance into the third spiritual stage, a stage that culminates in the full formation of the ego. At this level, the small self believes, *I am the object I possess. I am the one who talks when I am under the effects of the desired substance. I am this person's friend or that other person's son; I am this profession or that quality...*

This is how we define our persona,<sup>31</sup> the mask we use to hide who we really are. And so, we start projecting an image of ourselves, which we cling to with even more strength than we did to old desires. We hold to it so tightly that, in order to defend it, we are even willing to renounce our former attachments. Someone offends us and we feel hurt; but out of pride we decide to abandon our ambitions so that we might save face. Desire is no longer the most important thing and we invest all our energy in protecting our image. We gaze into our navels and find the centre of the Universe there, the immense Cosmos orbiting it.

When we spend so much energy on ourselves, we pay a high toll. The world seems to sink; everyone is against us; our friends abandon us; our enemies ignore us; bad luck takes us over, and our

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<sup>31</sup> The word 'persona' derives from the Latin and refers to a mask worn by theatre actors to make their voice resonate louder and identify them with their character. That's why person comes from *per sonare* (to sound through).

need to change becomes more and more obvious. It is then that we are called to reduce that small self we have taken so many lives to build, and to start opening our own heart. It is then that the fruit stops growing and starts to ripen. This represents the maturity of the soul, the most conflictive stage in the human developmental process.

With the impetus to change, the Self or Spirit begins to win the battle of the heart, the greater battle—or *Jihad Akbar*—to then venture into the second octave. This is not a battle against the infidels, but an internal war that seeks the annihilation of our ego. Those who live in the first few stages, however, become confused, seeking outside themselves for an enemy to fight, when the true enemy lives within. The ego tries to protect itself, and therefore cannot accept that it must do battle against itself. Seeking external enemies, it deflects attention from Spirit (*Ruh*) and, in this way, preserves a false identity.

As we move into the fourth spiritual stage, we realise that there are no enemies to fight against at all—just our own ego. It is then that attachment transmutes into love and the soul enters its old age. We become fully aware of others' needs, of the effects our actions have on our fellow beings, and of the consequences these very actions will one day have upon ourselves. It is in the fourth stage that the laws governing the Cosmos are revealed to us; that we come to know there is no action without reaction, no movement without return. The moment we realise this, we are willing to sacrifice a portion of our small self to maintain the harmony of our surroundings.

We are not as easily offended as before, and we accept ourselves and others, with all their limitations. We turn passion into compassion, ambition into serenity; others become equal to ourselves and we relate to them in this way. The small self

continues to be strong, but it is no longer dominant. It does not decide for us anymore, nor does it direct our thoughts. We no longer gaze into our navels; rather, our attention is focused on our chest, where we observe the ripe fruit, which we need to let go of to keep evolving.

In surrendering to the moment, we relinquish our preoccupations, but without renouncing our occupations. This is to live in the now, without seeking, without projecting into the future or being caught up in nostalgia for the past. It is to stop identifying with what surrounds us, and instead focus on what we really are. This is true freedom—no ties or strings attached. It is knowing that others are no different from us; understanding that when we possess nothing we have everything; that when we desire nothing, it's because nothing can possess us. The true experience of being alive, the magic of the moment begins with surrender to the present. In this, the soul finds its essence and the path of true freedom. To surrender is to make others ourselves, and ourselves Divinity; it is to stop thinking so that we can transmute; it is to transform desire into service, and longing into solidarity. In surrendering, first towards others, and finally towards the whole of Divinity, we culminate the fifth spiritual stage. The ripe fruit falls to the ground, like an offering to anyone who might need it.

When the small self has been practically dissolved, when the frontier that divides us from others is virtually imperceptible, when the duality that separates the object from the subject has been transcended momentarily, then we enter the sixth stage. This is the state of mystic ecstasy or spiritual rapture. It is marked by the soul's ability, not only to recognise its true nature, but also to become completely submerged by it. However at this point, ecstasy is transitory, like a borrowed object one must return. As an experience, it helps us to increase our spiritual strength because,

even though we have only experienced ecstasy once, it constitutes the potential to change our life.

In the sixth stage, the soul comes and goes like day and night, communing with Divinity to then return to the world of objects. This coming and going continues until the small self is completely dissolved. Then, the soul is free to again meet with its divine essence, forever transcending the duality that has limited it. When this occurs, we have entered the seventh stage. The seventh is an ineffable phase, beyond the mind, beyond the duality of language; therefore it cannot be described. It is a stage to be reached by all expressions of consciousness, be they mineral, vegetable, animal or human. Rumi, the Sufi poet, made this very clear when he wrote:

I died as a mineral and became a plant,  
I died as plant and rose to animal,  
I died as animal and I was Man.  
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?  
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar  
With angels blest; but even from angelhood  
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.  
When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,  
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.  
Oh, let me not exist! for Non-existence  
Proclaims in organ tones, To Him we shall return.<sup>32</sup>  
(Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi)

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<sup>32</sup> As translated in *The Mystics of Islam* (1914) edited by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, p. 125

# Fire



### \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The Visionary Alchemist \_\_\_\_\_



*He hails from a land  
where the heat of the fire is still necessary for survival;  
a land until recently blanketed in ice,  
with no trace of having been inhabited during the previous cycles.*

*Untouched by humanity,  
this is a land stripped of all weight from the past  
where the future is built  
from the endless struggle of entrepreneurial  
but never satisfied people.*



## **Breaking Tradition**

DAVID'S ANCESTORS HAD embodied the values and ambitions of his society. He was a descendant of those who had fled religious persecution in seventeenth century Europe; on a freezing November day, one of his forefathers had arrived in America on the Mayflower. David was born in Boston, and his circumstances had allowed him the opportunity to grow up in a cosmopolitan environment. This was an open-minded atmosphere, different to the America known for defending its values with a rifle in one hand and the Bible in the other. A Yale graduate, he was educated in those very classrooms that had cradled the leaders of a nation born not under the weight of the past, but with optimism for the future. As a PhD student at Princeton, he earned a scholarship in 1995 to conduct research at the university's Plasma Physics laboratory.

David's work involved studying the physical properties of spherical plasmas. This was carried out in the Tokamak Fusion Test Reactor (TFTR). In the Tokamak, magnetic fields were used to confine very hot ionised gases, called 'plasmas'. These plasmas triggered a chain reaction, fusing the atoms of lighter elements with heavier ones. The aim of this experiment was to try to obtain an endless and safe source of energy that would produce very little residue. Unlike conventional fission used by nuclear stations, this new source was going to generate energy by uniting, rather than splitting—from fusion instead of fission. The biggest obstacle David and his colleagues faced, however, was the complication caused by the elevated temperatures required to trigger the chain reaction that fused atomic nuclei. Such high temperatures could only be found at the core of huge stars.

During his first year of working at the lab, David's team successfully increased the plasma's temperature to 510 million

degrees Celsius—thirty times higher than the Sun's core. At that point, humankind was one step closer to achieving controlled nuclear fusion. The doors to a future source of infinite energy were blasted open. This milestone accessed the alchemy needed to transmute the chemical elements.

For one to understand the process of nuclear fusion they would need to comprehend how science understood the gradual emanation of the different chemical elements in the periodic table at this time. The scientific world believed that the fusion of atoms to produce new ones was only possible at the core of massive stars. This process was called, "stellar nucleosynthesis". The death of a star resulted in all the elements previously transmuted at its core being reduced to dust and interstellar gases. These would ultimately form a nebula, which, as a result of agglomeration, would finally become a new stellar system, or a galaxy. Then, with the eventual death of this system, even heavier elements would be released as interstellar dust and gas.

All was going well for David and his work until, on a day in November 1998, he typed two seemingly unconnected words into an internet search engine: "Biological transmutation". These words were to change his life forever. David had been thinking about the possibility that living organisms might be able to metabolise—each day, and at room temperature—in the same way that the Tokamak transmuted elements at 510 million degrees Celsius.

"Impossible!" said his lab colleague when David mentioned this idea the following day. "If a hen could transmute potassium into calcium as you claim, the radiated energy would not only burn it to cinders, but would also set the whole chicken pen on fire. How could a living organism possibly generate all the nuclear energy necessary to transmute an element? And even if it did, how could it then be done in a safe and controlled environment?"

“Why not?” replied David. “It wasn’t so long ago that we believed in a universe with a fixed number of atoms to each element. That kind of thinking came from Lavoisier<sup>33</sup>. From experiments he performed at the end of the eighteenth century, he saw how, after a chemical reaction, the quantity of matter didn’t seem to change. By drawing from the few experiments that had been done, and using measuring instruments and knowledge two centuries old, he hypothesised that the transmutation of one element into another was impossible<sup>34</sup>. But we know now that it is possible, at least at the core of stars.”

“Are you referring to Lavoisier’s law related to the conservation of mass?” asked his colleague.

“Yeah, and everything would have been fine if it wasn’t for another scientist named Vauquelin. Ten years after Lavoisier had published his *Elementary Treatise of Chemistry*, Vauquelin was surprised to find, through measuring the quantity of calcium in hens’ droppings, that it far exceeded the amount of the mineral they had consumed. His findings led him to suppose that the birds had generated calcium, although he couldn’t explain how.”

“The atomic hens you were telling me about,” said his partner mockingly.

David ignored his tone. He knew that sarcasm was a tactic used by those who wished to ridicule others’ arguments without actually engaging in them. In his view, this type of behaviour brought about intellectual conformity, but David was not a conformist. He was a scientist, and it was his duty to forge new roads in uncharted lands. He knew that, in order to explore, he first had to muster the courage to tackle the Goliath of scientific

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<sup>33</sup> Lavoisier was one of the four forefathers of Chemistry.

<sup>34</sup> Lavoisier, A.L. *Elementary Treatise on Chemistry*. Cuchet, Paris, 1789.

dogmatism – the attitudes of those who had never ventured beyond accepted boundaries. His only weapon was the method used by those who had challenged religious dogmatism four centuries before. This method was experimentation and common sense—the common sense to effectively interpret the results. And so, David simply said, “Only in the first half of the nineteenth century did the intransmutability of chemical elements come to be included as an experimental hypothesis. Alchemists—who had already spent centuries before this confirming that one element can indeed be transmuted into another—were discredited. Also, Vauquelin’s experiments were avoided because they were so meticulously proven that they couldn’t be denied.”

“Avoided?”

“Yes, they were literally eliminated from the official chemistry manuals. The last document that makes mention of them is Regnault’s manual, published in 1847.”<sup>35</sup>

“Really?”

“Yeah, but the saga didn’t end there. Afterwards, another of chemistry’s forefathers, the Swedish Berzelius, said that in Vogel’s experiments on the germination of seeds, the quantities of sulphur in the plant after it had reached maturity had increased. He went on to say that this could only have happened with the transmutation of some other element into sulphur. But those findings weren’t acknowledged in the scientific community either.”

“Are you saying that, at the time, the scientific world completely ignored the observations for lack of arguments to contest them?”

“Yes, at first they were ignored, but once the evidence could no longer be overlooked, it was censored.”

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<sup>35</sup> Regnault, H. V. *Course élémentaire de chimie*. Mason: Paris, 1854

“Censored!” said his colleague.

“Yes, censorship took place during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Seeing how the previous findings had been systematically suppressed, the German chemist, Von Herzeele, carried out so many observations that the evidence could no longer be ignored or denied. This drove him to perform a total of five hundred experiments with plants. He arrived at the same conclusion each time– that plants can transmute elements. His publication upset the scientific community so much that it simply disappeared from the shelves. It was fifty years before a copy was found by accident in Berlin by a Doctor Hauschka, who took Von Herzeele’s work and published it.”<sup>36</sup>

“Are you saying we have a scientific Tribunal of Inquisition that decides what is permissible and what will be censored?”

“It may not be a formally established tribunal because, unlike the Catholic Church, science doesn’t have a central organisation that deems what is acceptable and what is heresy; but yes, it can enforce a sort of covert censorship when a hypothesis undermines one of the fundamental pillars of the scientific canon. Remember, in Greek the word *hairesis* means ‘to choose’. And so, heretic refers to those who follow a path that is at variance with the accepted doctrine.”

He rose from his chair and began to pace, trying to focus his thoughts. The other man was silent, following David with his eyes. “After Von Herzeele’s experiments were republished,” David continued, “they fell into the hands of Doctor Pierre Baranger, director of the Organic Chemistry Laboratory at the École Polytechnique in Paris. Doctor Baranger suspected that, either Von Herzeele hadn’t done enough experiments, or that he hadn’t

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<sup>36</sup>For more information see: Hauschka, Rudolf. *The Nature of Substance: Spirit and Matter*, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2002

taken enough precautions to avoid mistakes. So, he repeated them within stricter, more scientific parameters.” David drew a piece of paper from his pocket and unfolded it. “Four years later, after completing thousands of observations, this is what he said and I quote:

*«My results seem impossible, but here they are. I took every precaution. I repeated the experiments many times. I made thousands of analyses for years. I had the results verified by third parties who did not know what I was investigating. I used several methods. I changed my experimenters. But there is no escape. We must submit to the evidence: plants transmute elements.»<sup>37</sup>*

David tucked the paper back into his pocket and met his colleague’s eyes. The man sat awkwardly, his brow furrowed. He opened his mouth as though to protest, then closed it. Leaning back in his chair, he crossed his arms. When he finally did speak, his tone was condescending. “You began by telling me about hens transmuting calcium, but all that you have said is related to the plant kingdom.”

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<sup>37</sup> Michel, A. “Un savant français bouleverse la science atomique”. *Science et Vie*, (1959): 81-87

“There is evidence of biological transmutation by micro organisms<sup>38</sup>, crustaceans<sup>39</sup>, birds<sup>40</sup>, rats<sup>41</sup>, and even by humans<sup>42</sup>. All you need do is study the evidence.”

David related to his colleague a range of studies that had been done within the last forty years. The man sat waiting for him to finish, his arms crossed. “So you’re claiming,” he said at last, “that science has systematically denied the possibility that living organisms can transmute elements simply because it’s easier to construct a reality where transmutation is only possible at extreme temperatures?”

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<sup>38</sup> Studies conducted by biochemist, H. Komaki, at Mukogawa University in Japan demonstrate how *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* and *Aspergillus niger* type microorganisms transmute another element into potassium as they grow. Source: [Komaki, H. “Sur la formation de sels de potassium par différentes familles de microorganismes dans un milieu sans potassium”. *Revue de Pathologie Comparee*, (1965)].

<sup>39</sup> At the Roscoff Marine Station a lobster was placed in a container filled with seawater from which calcium carbonate had been extracted by precipitation. The crustacean was able to form its shell without any problems. Source: [Kervran, C. Louis. *Biological Transmutation*. New York: Swan House Publishing Company, 1972. p.58].

<sup>40</sup> Doctor Corentin Louis Kervran kept some hens on a calcium deficient diet until their eggshells began to turn soft. He then administered potassium rich mica and the shells hardened once again. This led him to conclude that the hens had transmuted calcium from the following reaction: potassium (K) + hydrogen (H) => calcium (Ca). He was the first to suggest the possible mechanisms and original chemical elements from which transmutation occurs.

<sup>41</sup> Studies using rats performed by O. Heroux and D. Peter at the National Research Council of Canada confirmed that the animals had transmuted magnesium. Source: [Heroux, O. and Peter, D. “Failure of balance measurements to predict actual retention of magnesium and calcium by rats as determined by direct carcass analysis”. *Journal of Nutrition* (1975), volume 105, pages 1157-1167].

<sup>42</sup> Doctor Corentin Louis Kervran observed that workers at petroleum stations in the Sahara were excreting a larger amount of calcium than they had consumed even though their bones showed no decalcification. This led him to conclude that they were transmuting another element into calcium.

"I'm saying there are plenty of examples in history when we deny the evidence because of a certain degree of intellectual conformism. Endorsing such evidence would mean changing too many things. Take the Catholic Church, for instance. It banned Galileo from saying that the Earth revolved around the Sun, arguing that such an account had not been empirically demonstrated and, moreover, that it contradicted the Scriptures. Four centuries ago, the Church used the same two arguments that science has been using for the last two centuries to deny biological transmutation."

"I think you're being hasty, comparing the Renaissance Church with modern science."

"Galileo used mathematics to demonstrate empirically that the Earth revolved around the Sun, and to refute the ecclesiastical argument. The combination of mathematics and observation came to be the scientific method we know today. This same church, which had preserved so much knowledge in its monasteries after the collapse of the Roman Empire, became, during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, an obstacle to the path of progress. Now, the very same thing seems to be happening in modern science."

"I suppose confirming that the Earth wasn't at the centre of the Universe necessitated changing too many things," said his colleague.

"It necessitated altering a cosmology that had served as the foundation of a power structure, with a God who had placed us at the centre of Creation—a God that governed through Rome," said David. "But in my opinion, modern science is also being driven by dogmatic assertions and by a model that has very little to do with reality, just as the Church did during the Renaissance."

"What model do you mean?" asked his colleague.

## ✦ Atomic Orbital Model ✦

“A model that relies on the solidity of matter and the emptiness of space, without acknowledging that space is just the most subtle expression of matter,” David replied. “This is a framework that sees the atom as something made up of subatomic particles moving through empty space. To me, this is the same as believing in a flat Earth at the centre of the Universe. This model, along with the mathematics behind it, has led us to think that it is only possible to transmute elements using huge amounts of energy. It’s like believing in an abyss and a monster within—those things that were used to deter the curious from venturing out over the ocean.”

“But science believes in the wave-particle duality of matter; this is why it asserts that sometimes matter behaves like a wave, while at others it’s like a particle,” David’s colleague replied.

“Yes, which is the same as saying that the Earth is flat when observed from the surface (matter as particle), but round when seen from space (matter as wave). If we insist on thinking that the Earth is flat, we’ll go on believing that its horizon ends in an impassable abyss. If we insist on thinking that matter is made up of particles, we’ll go on believing that enormous quantities of energy are needed to fuse or split the atom.”

“But we have split the atom—by blasting its nucleus with neutrons, that is, with atomic particles. Through this, we’ve obtained a net energy gain,” he said.

“The fact that matter is condensed energy has nothing to do with particles. Einstein proved to the West what the East had already confirmed centuries before – that matter is nothing more

than an expression of energy.<sup>43</sup> But, for some reason, we find it hard to conceive of matter as space in motion, and to view space as subtle matter, which is just the same thing.<sup>44</sup> This is the reason why we've invented all those particles moving through empty space."

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<sup>43</sup> Swami Vivekananda, during his conference, "The Real Nature of Man," delivered in London in 1895, stated: "*It is possible to demonstrate that what we call matter does not exist at all. It is only a certain state of force. Solidity, hardness, or any other state of matter can be proven to be the result of motion.*" Source: [Swami Vivekananda. *Complete Works, Volume II*. Kolkata, India: Advaita Ashrama (1999) Chapter 2 "The Real Nature of Man"]. Vivekananda used the word 'force' to refer to the concept we currently define as 'energy'.

One of the most influential scientists of this time was Nikola Tesla. In a letter to a friend, Vivekananda wrote, "Mr. Tesla thinks he can demonstrate mathematically that force and matter are reducible to potential energy. I am to go and see him next week to get this new mathematical demonstration." Source: [Swami Vivekananda. *Complete Works, Volume V*].

This mathematical demonstration, which Vedic and Tantric philosophy had been confirming for centuries, had to wait another ten years.  $E = mc^2$ , the most famous formula of the twentieth century, was introduced to us by Albert Einstein, who included it in the appendix of his special theory of relativity. The formula seems to be a reformulation of "force equals mass times acceleration" ( $F = ma$ ), where acceleration {a} is substituted by the speed of light squared {c<sup>2</sup>} to express the inherent motion of matter, which Vivekananda had already asserted. For Einstein to have come up with such a formula, he would have first had to believe what had been written long before in the Vedic Scriptures. It is common knowledge that Einstein, along with Tesla and many others, turned to the Vedas for inspiration. It is also known that Einstein's first wife, Mileva Marić, was one of Tesla's very dear friends.

<sup>44</sup> Descartes refers to 'ether' as subtle matter which occupies space. This belief led Einstein to deny the fact that ether existed, not as subtle matter, but as substantial matter, occupying space. The difference between the two variant conceptions of ether becomes very clear when we consider what Einstein said when he was asked to summarise his relativity theory in a single sentence: "Until I announced my theory of relativity it was believed generally that if we removed every possible object from the universe time and space would still remain. But now, keeping the theory in mind, I believe that nothing, not even time and space, will remain if we remove all matter from the universe". (The New York Times, April 4th 1921 p.5) Cited in: (Illy, József. "Albert meets America: how journalists treated genius during Einstein's 1921 travels" *JHU Press* (2006): 43) This idea of space-time as subtle matter corresponds with the definition of *ākāśha*.

"But the existence of many of those particles has been scientifically proven!" said his colleague.

"They have been mathematically proven," David said. "In the sphere of mathematics, it's possible to define concepts and to construct models without them actually having to relate to the real world. In the realm of numbers, equations only exist as mental images. Science, on the other hand, aims to study and to understand physical reality, with each one of its varying branches focusing on a specific discipline. This is why relying on mathematical language can be dangerous. There is the risk of losing touch with reality, of creating myths..."

"—Of losing our firm foothold on the ground," said his colleague.

"Yeah," David replied. "One might start floating, believing, all the while, that one is still standing on solid ground. Quantum physics, for instance, studies a reality that cannot be directly observed, so we have no other choice but to make suppositions about it. We can conceive of this reality in many different ways, one of which is mathematically. But, just as language is the conversion of ideas into words, mathematics is the translation of hypotheses and theories into numbers. It's too abstract to be the means of actually finding out the truth. It's similar to what the Catholic Church did by delivering its sermons in Latin. Because of this, the masses were unable to detect incoherencies. We go from this to theorising about new subatomic particles and proving their existence mathematically; that's why our theories become more and more cryptic. We're repeating the same thing we did in Ancient Greece – creating a new god or goddess every time we need to explain an inexplicable phenomenon."

"I don't think that's a good comparison," his colleague said.

"In the Greek Pantheon there were twelve main gods and goddesses called, 'Olympians'. After these, there were another

twenty or so, lower in stature. Similarly, in the pantheon of subatomic particles, we've already counted more than thirty.<sup>45</sup> In fact, we've taken the current model for the atom from the Ancient Greek world. And so, all we've actually done is reclaim an ancient philosophical interpretation of reality and continued to build upon it. We've come to believe that our interpretation and our model constitute reality. This is why we don't want to accept the possibility of biological transmutation; because it would mean accepting that much of what we call 'science' is actually an illusion constructed upon myths; it would mean acknowledging that the Earth is not flat, and that it isn't at the centre of the Universe."

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At first David had seen disbelief on his colleague's face. Then it changed, from concern, to condescension, to animosity, and acceptance. Finally, the man resorted to pragmatism. "I understand what you're trying to say, but before you go any further and approach our lab colleagues with all these ideas, you should consider that it's been a year and a half since the Tokamak project was finished. The Department of Energy invested millions of dollars in the project. In its fifteen years of operation, the machine's biggest milestone was raising the temperature of plasma to that needed for nuclear fusion. The department is now selecting team members for the National Spherical Torus Experiment (NSTX) and, thanks to the success of the Tokamak project, we can expect that we'll be the ones managing it."

"I'm fully aware of that."

"I'm glad that you are, because, as you know, we still can't decide how we're going to dismantle the Tokamak. Our goal is to continue investigating spherical plasmas until we can generate a safe and

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<sup>45</sup> Current standard model has identified 17 elemental particles: six quarks, six leptons, four gauge bosons and the Higgs boson, called God's particle by some.

endless source of energy with a low impact on the environment. The key to success lies in temperature—that is, in reaching temperatures equivalent to those found, not merely at the core of our Sun, but at the core of even more massive stars. According to the current model, these temperatures are necessary for transmuting the heavier elements of the periodic table.” He met David’s eyes, his face grave. “If, in the middle of all this, you tell the others that you believe the transmutation of elements is possible inside living organisms, what you’re really saying is that the Tokamak and the millions of dollars spent by the Department of Energy on nuclear fusion were unnecessary. You’d be saying that all we need to transmute potassium into calcium is a hen.

“If, on top of that, you say subatomic particles—which we base all our research on—are nothing more than projections of our minds, you’ll be surrendering, not only your opportunity to become a member of the experiment, but also, the scholarship that pays your mortgage, and the possibility of landing a job in any other research centre. If you go on entertaining these ideas, you’ll end up writing pseudoscience for some New Age magazine. You’ll be living out of a caravan at a hippie commune in New Mexico.”

*What is science? David thought. Is it our effort to make discoveries that will increase humankind’s understanding of the world? If this is so, science would embrace any knowledge that helps us expand our awareness, including philosophy, and what he calls ‘pseudoscientific’ thinking.*

*Or is it the knowledge we gain when we apply a pre-determined approach—the scientific method? If this is so, science should at least have accepted—given the evidence in its favour—that living organisms are able to transmute elements.*

*Or is 'science' the label a self-proclaimed elite has given to a body of knowledge so that they might preserve the privileges that are enjoyed by those who stick to their rules?*

David's inner voice responded with another question:

*What is God? Is God the Absolute, Omnipresent, Omniscient, and Omnipotent consciousness, which is all-embracing and reaches out to everyone? If this is so, all religions, beliefs, and spiritual paths talk about the same divine presence. Therefore, we should be able to define God as a state of being; a state, not foreign to us, but accessible to every one of us.*

*Or is God, on the other hand, the One, the Mighty, the source of moral obligations, and the being that helps us to distinguish between good and evil? If so, God would be defined by monotheistic, patriarchal religions. As imperfect as this conception seems, at least it would mean that Jews, Christians, and Muslims go hand in hand, fully aware that they are referring to the same divinity.*

*Or is God the label an elite has given to divinity to preserve privileges enjoyed by those who stick to the rules?*

After a few moments of reflection, David's thoughts returned to the conversation with his colleague. "Galileo proposed the scientific method to counter the arguments of those who believed in a restricted definition of God. Now, others are trying to preserve a restricted definition of science. The problem, though, is not to be found in religion because science has become a new religion with its own myths, doctrines, canons, and dogmas. The problem lies in humankind's tendency to limit reality until it is turned into an excuse that justifies the centralisation of power and the preservation of certain privileges." With this, David turned from his colleague and left.

*Why fight it?* he thought as he drove home. *The Goliath of conformism and dogmatism will tumble down under its own weight, without me even needing to throw a stone. The Earth didn't return to a flat state when we forgot in the Middle Ages that it was round. During that time we saw it as a dish because we couldn't conceive of it as a sphere.*

## 🛡️ Strengthening Foundations

OVER THE FOLLOWING months, David studied how other cultures had interpreted the fundamental elements of nature. He knew that, according to science, there were approximately one hundred chemical elements. These were set apart by the number of protons in their nucleus, which defined their atomic weight. The lightest element was hydrogen, with its nucleus containing only one proton. Next was helium, lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and so on<sup>46</sup>.

However, when David absorbed himself in the interpretations of other cultures and traditions, he realised that a great many of them only mentioned four fundamental elements: *earth, water, air, and fire*. In addition, there was a fifth element, which functioned as

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<sup>46</sup> Iodine has fifty-three protons in its nucleus and is the heaviest element necessary for organic life. Almost all the other elements up to uranium—with an atomic weight of ninety-two—are found in nature: however, they do not make up living organisms. Those heavier than ninety-two are known as ‘transuranic’ elements and are very unstable. From this batch of elements only two—plutonium and neptunium—have been observed on our planet, but only in trace quantities. Conventional nuclear power plants use the fission of two frontier elements—uranium and plutonium synthesised from uranium—to generate energy. These elements are considered ‘frontier elements’ because they are unstable; therefore it is much easier to split their nucleus.

the encompassing principle or 'quintessence'. This was called 'ether'<sup>47</sup>, 'ākāsha', or simply, "the fifth element".

The most ancient written references to these elements could be found in the various philosophic branches of Hinduism, such as Tantrism or Sāṅkhya, philosophies which referred to the elements as the five *tattva* (principles) or *pancha mahabhutas* (five great elements). They were: *prithivi* (earth), *apa* (water), *tejas* (fire), *vayu* (air), and *ākāsha* (space-time), with this last one functioning as the all-encompassing and unifying principle.

The historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama (563–483? B.C) developed an understanding of the elements (*tattva*) from the philosophies he had been introduced to: however, he only acknowledged the first four and called them '*catudhātu*'. These four *catudhātu* included the fundamental properties of the '*kalapas*', which were: vibration (air), temperature (fire), cohesion (water), and solidity (earth). The *kalapas* were responsible for giving form (*rupa*). Buddha stated that suffering was a result of material attachment, which was, therefore, attachment to everything made up of the four elements.

Shortly before he attained *parinirvana* (the physical death of the awakened soul), Buddha sent sixty enlightened emissaries (*arahants*) to the four corners of the known world to spread the teachings of dharma. During this same period, Empedocles (490–430 B.C), a philosopher of Ancient Greece, was born. It was highly likely that Empedocles' first knowledge of the elements came from an emissary recounting the teachings of the Buddha.

Empedocles called the elements 'the four roots'. While these had previously been defined by four other philosophers as operating individually, he identified them as a co-dependent whole

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<sup>47</sup> This should not be confused with the chemical compound bearing the same name.

by asserting that matter emerged from a combination of elements in exact proportions. Thus Thales of Miletus' *water*, Anaxímenes of Miletus' *air*, Xenophanes of Elea's *earth*, and Heraclitus of Ephesus' *fire* came to be the four roots.

Hippocrates (460-370 B.C), considered the father of medicine, believed that these elements were to be found in the four humours, or temperaments. He associated the sanguine temperament with *air*, the choleric with *fire*, the phlegmatic with *water*, and the melancholic with *earth*.

Plato (428-348 B.C) inherited the elements from his forefathers, and connected them to different shapes within the realm of geometry. For him, the octahedron represented *air*, the tetrahedron *fire*, the icosahedron *water*, and the hexahedron, *earth*. He also introduced a fifth element, which he called, 'idea' (ἰδέα) or, 'the divine' (ἱερόν, *hieron*). This, he attributed to the dodecahedron. It was Plato who reintroduced the fifth element, which had been omitted by the Buddha from his list of *catudhātu*.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C) incorporated the elements into physics. He called Plato's idea 'ether', the substance from which celestial spheres were made. In addition, he conferred attributes to each of the elements as follows: *fire* was hot and dry; *earth* was cold and dry; *air* was hot and humid, and *water* was cold and humid.

The five elements were introduced to Japanese tradition through Buddhism, and were known as '*godai*'. In ascending order, according to the power attributed to them, these were: *ji* (*earth*), *ka* (*fire*), *fū* (*wind*), *sui* (*water*), and *kū* (*space* or *sky*).

The significance and uses of the elements were passed down to Tibetan Buddhism in three ways: through Buddhism and its four *catudhātu*; through Tantrism and its five *tattva*; and through the Bön religion. The latter was grounded in shamanic belief and was

already being practiced in Tibet when Buddhism was established there in the seventh century A.D.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the elements were associated with what was known as, “the Five Pure Lights”, related to the rainbow body, a body of pure light which one would attain once the original state of mind (*dzogchen*) was reached. Before this pure state could be achieved; however, the mind had to be like the *earth* element in its ability to serve as the basis of all existence; like *water* in its continuity and adaptability; like *fire* in its clarity and its capacity to illuminate; like *air* in its constant movement; and like *space* in its emptiness and limitless potential.

Tibetans also related the elements to the five different densities of vital energy (*vayus* or *pranas*) that made up the energy body. This gave them a deep understanding of the decay process at the time of death. They assert that these five *pranas* leave the physical body and return to the astral body of the deceased, following a very specific sequence. When the dying person enters into the intermediate stage of death (*Chikkhai bardo*), the *earth prana* dissolves into *water*. This weakens the body of the moribund and a gleaming mirage appears to him. Then, the *water prana* turns into *fire*, causing bodily fluids to evaporate and a smoke-like vision to appear. This is followed by the disintegration of the *fire prana* into *air*. The body would then begin to lose heat—particularly in the extremities—and small sparks emerge. Finally, as the *air prana* increases its vibratory frequency, it changes into *space*. Respiration ceases, and the dying person would see a vision of a candle or a small lamp extinguishing. With this last breath, the soul parts to enter into the transitional state of light (*Chönyid bardo*).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The inspiration for this explanation came from: Rinpoche, Sogyal. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, (2002):255-257

Perhaps the most surprising thing to David was the uniformity and consistency with which most of the so-called shamanic traditions spoke about the elements. For them, these had always been known as “the four grandparents”. The elements of *earth* and *water* had given birth to Mother Earth: and from *fire* and *air* had come Father Sun. Then, the sacred union between these two sets of elements had created life on our planet. The common thread that ran through the shamanic traditions showed David that the four elements were rooted in myriad cultures: Navajo, Maya, Aztec, Toltec, Huichol, Zapotec, Inca, Shoshone, Tsimshian, Hopi, and Lakota, among others.

For instance, the elements within the Lakota system were: *makece* (*earth*), *mni* (*water*), *peta* (*fire*), and *oniye* (*air*). In Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, they were: *atl* (*water*), represented by *Tlaloc* (the blood of the Universe); *tlalli* (*earth*) represented by *Tezcatlipoca* (the flesh of the Universe); *ehecatli* (*air*) represented by *Quetzalcoatl* (the breath of the Universe); and finally, *tlachinolli* (*fire*) represented by *Huitzilopochtli* (the heart of the Universe).

The elements also came to light in many legends within oral traditions. These told of ethereal beings that were neither human nor animal. They were the fairies, elves, and genies, which could be seen only by those with the gift of clairvoyance (clear vision). These legends mentioned four types of creatures among ethereal beings. They were called, ‘elementals’ because they were made from one basic element. The four categories of elementals were defined as: gnomes (*earth*), nymphs (*water*), salamanders (*fire*), and sylphs (*air*).

In Jewish Kabbalah, the elements were present in the four archangels of protection. Raphael served as the archangel of *air*, Michael as *fire*, Gabriel as *water*, and Uriel as *earth*. In addition, the Torah and the Bible also referred to the elements symbolically. They were embodied in the four living creatures that sat near the

Throne of God<sup>49</sup>. The lion represented *fire* (Leo), the calf, *earth* (Taurus), the man, *air* (Aquarius), and the eagle, *water* (Scorpion).

The alchemists of the Middle Ages inherited the elements from Aristotle. Jabir ibn Hayyan (Geber), the Arab alchemist, developed a system made up of the five classic elements, along with sulphur and mercury. Salt was added later on to denote solidity.

In the tarot, these elements were represented by the four suits. Wands symbolised *fire*, swords were *air*, cups were *water*, and pentacles, *earth*.

Without realising it, even science referred to the five elements when describing the different states of density in matter. Originally, there were three states, namely: solid, liquid, and gas. These correlated respectively with the elements, *earth*, *water*, and *air*. But in 1879, Sir William Crookes identified a state between liquid and gas, which he called, 'plasma'. Plasma was linked to the element of *fire*.

As far as the fifth state of density went, it wasn't until almost four decades later that Einstein proved, in his general theory of relativity, that the gravitational effect of a celestial body could shift space-time. If space-time became distorted by the gravitational pull of matter, then it could not be Absolute. Instead, it must contain physical properties.<sup>50</sup>

Science was still trying to prove what various philosophical schools of Hinduism had confirmed millenniums before: that

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<sup>49</sup> Revelation 4:7 and they also appear in Ezekiel 1:10 and Ezekiel 10:14

<sup>50</sup> In 1924 Einstein wrote: "So we are effectively forced by the current state of things to distinguish between matter and aether, even though we may hope that future generations will transcend this dualistic conception and replace it with a unified theory, as the field theoreticians of our day have tried in vain to accomplish." Einstein, Albert. *Über den Äther, Verhandlungen der Schweizerischen naturforschenden Gesellschaft* (1924) 105 (2): 85–93.

matter was actually condensed space.<sup>51</sup> Sāṅkhya and Tantric philosophies had already proven this in a highly intuitive way. They asserted that, in the emanating process of matter, its first tangible manifestation was *ākāśha* (space-time), a state of density from which we perceive vibration (sound). Thereafter, matter emerged as *air*, an element with even greater density. Aside from being heard, *air* could also be felt when it touched the body. The process continued when consciousness projected itself as *fire*. This state could be heard, felt, and seen. Matter then became *water*, an expression heard, felt, seen, and tasted. Finally, it appeared as *earth*, a state of density perceived by all five senses.<sup>52</sup>

David realised that he could not find the knowledge he needed to expand his consciousness in the classrooms of even the most prestigious universities and that he must search for answers elsewhere.

*Perhaps, the best way to start would be to explore the natural wisdom of those who originally inhabited the plains, mountains, and deserts of my own birth land,* he thought.

## 🐘 The Journey

THIS WAS A land crisscrossed by an extensive road network; covered with a cobweb of power, telephone, and fibre optic cables; filled with thousands of urban settlements; and fenced round to foster cattle and a sense of ownership. It was a land that had been

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<sup>51</sup> Several schools of Hindu philosophy, such as Sāṅkhya, Nyāya, Vaisheshika as well as Tantric texts perceive *ākāśa* (fifth element) as an expression of matter.

<sup>52</sup> Note how, in this description, the sequence is the exact opposite to the one followed during the death of the physical body, when the different densities of vital energy (*vayus* or *pranas*) abandon the physical body to be reintegrated into the astral body.

prospected by an army of agents from the United States Geological Survey (USGS). Its image had been captured from space by satellites; from the air by planes; and from the ground by myriads of idle tourists. Even though, after almost four centuries of colonisation, it had already been widely explored, David wanted to discover those things that went unnoticed. He wished to better understand the relationship between humankind and nature, and for this he sought what he considered to be the best option—connecting with the original inhabitants of this vast territory.

*Maybe they'll be able to tell me what I need to understand*, he thought.

That's how he decided, in July of 1999, to put his house up for sale, jump in the car, and drive west. He headed to South Dakota to visit the Oglala Lakota nation, formerly a nomadic community from the plains, well-known for their ability to integrate the four elements into their cosmology and knowledge system.

He left at daybreak, took the I-76 W, then the I-80 W, and continued on the I-90 W. Having driven one thousand, seven hundred miles in five days, stopping at motels along the way, he arrived at Rapid City on a Saturday in mid-afternoon.

The city did not live up to its name, because it didn't seem a place where everything and everyone was in a rush. David thought that perhaps it had been a rapid place in its early years, when herds of miners were visiting the city on a daily basis to stock up while searching for gold in Black Hills. But more than a century had passed since then, and what he found was a community of some sixty thousand inhabitants who fit perfectly into this small, stereotypical American town.

David parked his car next to a shopping centre and set off down one of the wide avenues. A storm was on its way so he decided to take shelter in a cafe. Entering the first one he came across, he sat

down at the table closest to the entrance, right beside the huge window. When the waitress came over to take his order he noticed that she was Native American.

“A strawberry shake, please,” he said.

“Coming right up,” she replied.

“With soy—not cow’s milk.”

“You’re not from here, right?” she said. “You’ve got the look of someone from the East Coast.”

“I suppose you can tell from my accent.”

“Not only your accent, but from the way you’re dressed—and because you asked for soy milk. Not that we don’t like soy milk here...” the girl added.

“It’s just that I’m allergic to dairy.”

“Yeah, I’ve noticed allergies are on the rise. If a customer isn’t allergic to dairy, it’s gluten; and if it’s not gluten, they won’t take sugar because they’ve got diabetes, or they’re overweight, or they’ve got candida. I don’t think it’ll be long before we’re all allergic to soy too, being an industrial product causing deforestation of the Amazon.”

“And what do you think is the cause of all these allergies?” David asked.

“I think we’ve abused dairy, gluten, and sugar. What processed food doesn’t have at least one of the three—if not all three!” she said with a helpless gesture. “They’re addictive and the food corporations know this. That’s why they’re in almost every kind of processed food. Soy and corn are also in a lot of them—not to cause addiction, but because of their versatility. But if we must destroy our environment to get a product, eventually the product will destroy us since we are one with Nature. Illnesses work along this

same principle. In other words, there aren't sicknesses, but sick ecosystems and thus, sick people. Modern society doesn't seem to want to accept this, so we search for cures in pills that can be manufactured, patented, and commercialised."

She left his table and continued with her rounds. After a while she returned with his shake. "Made with organically-farmed soy milk, so it's not genetically modified. I know you haven't asked, but I thought you'd appreciate it."

David took a drink.

"What brings you to Rapid City?" she asked. "It doesn't seem like you're here as a tourist since you're travelling with a notebook. But you're not dressed like you're here on business either."

"As a matter of fact, I'd like to get to know a Lakota elder. I'm trying to gain a better understanding of nature, especially of the four fundamental elements."

"You're not just saying that to make a pass at me," she said with a mischievous smile.

"No, I'm being honest. I've driven five days to get here."

"I can tell you're sincere from your eyes," she said. "Wait here and I'll see what I can do for you."

A few minutes later, after attending to the other tables, the girl returned. "I only work on weekends, and since today is Saturday we can go to Pine Ridge Reservation on Monday, if you want. It's two hours from here. I'll introduce you to those who can help."

"Thanks a lot," he replied. "What's your name?"

"Meera Wanci Tiwahe". As she pronounced her name, Meera drew a circle on a napkin with an "H" at the centre and a vertical line down the middle. To the Lakota, this was their way of expressing that all life is but one family, that is, *Wanci Tiwahe*.



### **The Test**

FIRST THING MONDAY morning David arrived at the cafe to meet with Meera. She came a few minutes later, radiating the calm of someone about to enjoy a quiet time with family. She was wearing a beautiful silky red dress that gracefully accentuated the voluptuous curves of her body. David didn't know whether or not to offer a compliment, but after a brief inner battle, his shyness drowned out his words before he could form them.

Leaving the cafe, they headed south towards Hot Springs where they stopped to grab a bite. Continuing southeast, they arrived at Pine Ridge in the afternoon. Only Meera's sister and her three small nephews were at home. As she started fixing dinner with her sister, David took a seat on the couch. A few minutes later, one of Meera's nephews, a boy of about seven, approached and asked David to follow him. He led him from the house towards the main road. Then, after turning onto a much narrower street, they stopped in front of a shabby-looking house. The boy made a motion with his hand for David to go inside. It did not seem like the boy had any intention of accompanying him so David entered and began walking down a hallway. He could hear voices coming from

the room at its end, so he approached and knocked on the doorframe. No one seemed to have heard him. He peeked into the room to see many people staring back at him.

There were about twenty people, sitting in a circle, on chairs, old couches, or just leaning against the wall. The floor was littered with beer cans and cigarette butts. There were no smiles—not even forced ones. One of the elderly men asked a younger one to get up from his chair so that David could sit. David kindly offered his thanks as he did, but when he observed the people around him, he could not understand much of what was going on. They continued drinking and talking as if nothing had happened.

Then, the middle aged man sitting next to him said, “You see what you’ve done? You see?”

“Don’t you start,” another man yelled. “We already know—it’s the same old story.”

“No, no. I want to tell it!” he shouted, rising to his feet and looking David directly in the eyes. He kicked a beer can and it spilled out onto the floor. “These plains were once crowded with buffaloes, and your ancestors killed them. They didn’t want them for their meat, just their skin—and to starve us to death.”

“We already know that,” the people around him said. “Let’s just have a peaceful get-together; we don’t want Meera’s guest to think we’re unfriendly.”

“Let me speak,” the man went on. “Beer can’t ease my sorrow, so I have a right to say what I want. More than a century ago, his ancestors promised to respect this land and the treaties signed on it. But they betrayed those treaties and they disrespected this land, again and again!”

David rose from his chair and, looking into the man’s eyes, he said, “From the bottom of my heart, I am sorry. I really am. I

understand your pain. I respect you, and I'm here to learn about you all. I'm aware of what my ancestors did to get these lands, and it hurts me; but I hope that many people like me will come knocking on this door to sit here amongst you all and listen to your wisdom, which we could not understand in the past."

A woman sitting across the room gestured for David to come closer. It seemed to him that she was the matriarch; not only was she one of the few women present, but she was also the eldest and one of the only people without a beer in her hand. She gripped David by his shoulders, drawing him closer. Touching her forehead to his, she whispered, "*mic'ínkši, mic'ínkši*".

After this, no one dared to unleash resentment on the young man. In fact, everyone present began speaking to him in a friendly way, giving him the opportunity to take part in their conversations. His exchange with John Long Way was one that stood out. John was fifty, and had a serious face, but his smile and his eyes revealed that there was also plenty of goodness in him, the sort of goodness that did not let years of hardship bring him down.

"In the Lakota culture, we have four key values: generosity, respect, courage, and wisdom,"<sup>53</sup> John said. "As testimony to these, we have a saying that goes like this: 'what you give away, you keep; what you keep, you lose.' When the Europeans came, they had entirely different beliefs. Instead, they thought: 'what you give away, you lose; what you keep to yourself, you save.' See? They're almost the same words but in a different order."

David focused his full attention on John and his words; he did not want to miss a single detail. The man provoked a feeling of familiarity in David's heart.

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<sup>53</sup> In the language of the Lakota these are *wacantognaka*, *wowacintanka*, *woohitika*, and *woksape* respectively.

“Your culture urges its people to hold onto things,” he went on. “Your culture says that you should invest and be greedy to gain what you all call ‘interest’ or ‘yield’. Your culture believes that by giving away, you lose, so it can’t appreciate the magic behind life’s great mystery. It doesn’t see that we are all one and the same, and so by giving we are actually receiving, since we are really giving to ourselves. Hoarding, on the other hand, is losing. This is how Nature works. In Nature everything moves: water, air, fire—even the continents. The moment anything is kept in the bottom of a drawer—either for later use or for contemplation—it stands still until it begins to decompose. It decays like stagnant water in a marsh. Owning halts circulation and disrupts the natural flow of life. Do you follow?”

“Yes.”

“It is the natural law of reciprocity. Each time the Universe witnesses an exchange of energy, it contributes more; but whenever energy is left stagnant, it is called back. You could see it as true lovemaking. Two lovers give to each other equally, allowing their energy to flow back and forth between them. A circuit is created and through this they begin to attract more energy, thereby increasing their level of vitality without ever becoming weary. They enjoy more by sharing what they receive; it is returned and increased yet again.”

“And money, is that also an expression of energy?” David asked.

“Yes. Money is energy vibrating at its lowest frequency. That’s why anyone who pursues money is never satisfied. It’s like food that doesn’t nourish the soul, causing those who seek it to always feel hungry.”

John Long Way’s words still resonated in David’s mind when he arrived back at Meera’s. “They’ve told me my grandmother welcomed you,” she said.

"Yes, she touched her forehead to mine and whispered, 'mic'ínkši, mic'ínkši', but I don't know what it means."

"It means my son and so, brother to everyone else in the room."

"But I'm not her son!" David exclaimed.

"Oh, David. You still have a lot to learn about our culture. The person I call father is really my mother's brother. Since we don't have a word for uncle we say *até* which literally means, father. This is not my sister's house, but the place of the person who you would call, cousin. She is my mother's brother's daughter, but since I call my mother's brother, father, I also call his daughter, sister. Together we are an extended family (*tiyospaye*). We consider family the core of our wealth, and as the Lakota nation, we are also one big family. We are an *Oyate*, which you would translate as nation, like the Bear Nation (*mato oyate*) or the Eagle Nation (*wanbli oyate*). We consider ourselves related to the animals, the plants, the wind that blows, the fire that burns, the stones which support us, and the rain that nourishes us."

"So your father, or uncle—or whatever you call him—has invited me to the sweat lodge (*inipi*) taking place tomorrow morning."

"Yeah, sweating is the best way to get the alcohol out of his system. The word *inipi* comes from *iniunkajaktelo*, which literally means, we're going to pray in the sweat lodge. In the case of my father, though, I feel it's just an excuse to sweat off his hangover. Anyways, I've been talking to grandmother and she says that after the *inipi* she'll be available to answer your questions."

"Thanks a lot, Meera."

"Don't thank me. Thank yourself for passing the test with flying colours. Here, as you've seen, there are those who drink alcohol, and others who detest it along with the effect it has on our people."

"Yes, I've noticed. That's why I was surprised to see a woman like your grandmother among all the others. She doesn't seem like the type to drink or to fit into that environment."

"Neither her, nor John, nor any of the other sober people who were there do drink. She went to supervise things. She can't stop them, but as much as she doesn't want to be there, she has to—to make sure that they don't hurt themselves or drink too much. If one of the men does get drunk, she doesn't let him go home because he might hit his wife. Instead, she makes him sleep it off in the next room."

"She's a strong woman, your grandmother."

"All Oglala Lakota women are strong—very strong. Life has made them like leather, but they still retain the velvety texture of its underside. In the women, this softness remains hidden on the inside. My grandmother only recently moved to Pine Ridge. She's lived all her life in small rural communities where people still preserve the old traditions, like the names of the *Tiyošpaye* leaders. Grandmother says that she came here because she's old and needs us to care of her, but I know that she really came to take care of us."

## ☛ The Wheel of the Elements

THE FOLLOWING DAY, at dawn, Meera's father woke David to go to the *inipi* where they were expecting three other men. He was pleasantly surprised to find that one of them was John Long Way. The second was the man who, in his drunken state the previous night, had reminded David of the actions of the first European settlers.

The *inipi* was constructed from sixteen young willow tree branches woven into the shape of a dome. Next to it was a barrel

with a gas burner. In the barrel, David saw a cluster of rocks. Firewood would have been used in the old days, but as there weren't many trees left on the reservation, wood was expensive and hard to find. For this reason gas burners had become popular. *Modern times*, David thought.

The men greeted him when he arrived. They began covering the structure with canvas, followed by a bunch of wool blankets, and a tanned hide, which functioned as a door. A boy did most of the work. He was going to be the firekeeper.

John entered first. Shortly afterwards, he came back out and set a tobacco pipe in a small mound of earth next to the gas burner. He ensured that the pipe's mouthpiece was turned towards the east. Then the men got undressed, walked three laps around the *inipi*, kneeled in front of the entrance, and crawled inside. None of them spoke.

This time, John was the last to enter. He sat facing west, just across from the doorway. David took a seat to his left, and Meera's father sat on his right. Meanwhile, the other two men took places closer to the entrance. In the *inipi* there was a strong smell of tobacco blended with the sweet scent of herbs.<sup>54</sup>

John gestured to one of the men sitting at the doorway who told the boy standing outside to bring in the rocks. There were seven volcanic stones in total, the first with a small red circle painted on it. As each was brought in, John rubbed it with white sage which released a purifying smoke. The boy responsible for the fire then brought in a bucket filled with water and a ladle. Lastly, John said, "Yuŋpa yo!" which was the order to close up the entrance.

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<sup>54</sup> This is derived from the scientific name *hierochloa odorata*, referred to as 'wacanga' in the language of the Lakota people.

When the hide was pulled down, the room fell into complete darkness. Then David heard the sound of the water being poured over the red-hot rocks, and felt the sensation of vapour hitting his face. Each time the water was poured, the four men repeated the words, "*Ho tunkašila!*" David did not hesitate in joining them. The water turned the initial dry heat into a humid one.

Aside from the exclamations of, "*Ho tunkašila!*" no one said a word. David understood straight away that the silence invited one to reflect and connect with his inner voice, which, for the Lakota nation, defined the seventh direction.

Then, with a short command, John told the man closest to the door to pull back the hide. David let out a sigh of relief, thankful for the gust of fresh air that rushed into the lodge. John took a sip of water from the ladle, then said, "*Mitak oyas'in*". This is how the Lakota people give thanks to all kingdoms: minerals, vegetables, animals, as well as the different human nations. He offered the bucket of water to Meera's father, who also drank it directly from the ladle. They passed it around until it was David's turn.

After everyone had drunk his share, the firekeeper brought in a new collection of glowing rocks as well as a frame drum. Once the rocks had been blessed, the door was closed again, and the water poured. John started to strike the drum with the drumstick at four beats per second. Then he began singing in a half-broken voice to the rhythm of the tum-tum. The melody filled the room and set a pattern that the others echoed with a gentle sway.

What happened next was difficult for David to understand. His mind had been trained to analyse, not simply to contemplate; to rationalise instead of feeling, but with the drum song and the heat, he fell into a profound state of trance. He saw himself riding what looked like a prize stud horse on the vast prairies of the Midwest.

John sat before him on the beast, holding the reins. They were bareback riding.

David knew that the man was John even though his face looked different. He also sensed that John was his father, and that they were both Sioux. Even as David was immersed in his vision, he realised that this event could only have happened about two centuries prior to his time. It could not have occurred before the arrival of the Europeans, because they were the ones who had brought horses back into America. It could not have happened after the natives had been confined to reservations either, because he was overwhelmed with a feeling of happiness and freedom, as if the Massacre of Wounded Knee had not yet taken place.

On the horizon he saw a woman who he knew to be his mother in this past life. She was shouting, as if trying to warn them of something. Then, he heard a gunshot. His father dropped dead to the ground. Two white men emerged from the forest, one holding a gun. They approached. The man with the rifle raised it and pointed it at David, and the other cried, "But he's only a kid!"

"Anyone who's seen his father die this way will be our enemy in the future," he replied.

"So keep that bullet for when he's older. We're soldiers—not slayers of women and children. You've already got your payback for that arrow wound two weeks ago."

"Well, since you asked. But if you hadn't, I would've sent him straight to hell!"

Though the man with the gun looked different, David recognised him as the one who had confronted him about his ancestors killing the buffaloes—the one who, at that moment, was sitting across from him in the *inipi*.

The two men left him then, walking towards the forest where their horses were waiting. David slid from his mount to hug his father, hoping he would still be alive. Then his mother came, pulling him round to check that he wasn't wounded before falling onto her husband's chest. She cried and moaned. The man had died on the fresh spring grass. David recognised the crying woman—his mother—as Meera's grandmother in his present life.

Now I understand why she said, "*mic'ínkši, mic'ínkši*," he thought.

When David came out of his trance, John was no longer singing. He asked for the door to be opened, letting in another gust of fresh air. David saw, in the light from the entrance, that John was staring at him. This man, who had been his father in another life, murmured, "*mic'ínkši, mic'ínkši*", and gave him a big smile. The man sitting at the door watched them both with a bemused expression.

The next two rituals took place in a much more relaxed atmosphere. The men spoke, sometimes even joked with each other, and it was a lot less formal.

## The Medicinal Wheel

ONCE THE *INIPI* ceremony was over, Meera came for him. She led him to where her grandmother was waiting for them under one of the few trees still growing in that barren land. She was making a quilt from material of different types and colours. When she saw them approaching, she put her work aside and began reciting the Lakota greeting and prayer called, *Mitakuye Oyasin*, which literally means, to all my relations. When she had finished, she addressed David in the Lakota language and Meera interpreted for him.

"Grandmother is asking what you wish to know."

"I want to understand the four elements of nature and to establish a connection between them and the chemical elements that science tells us about."

"Did you see how each of the four elements manifested during the *inipi* ritual?" the woman asked.

"*Fire* was obviously present in the hot rocks. *Water* was poured over the rocks to produce steam. The *earth* element was to be found in the structure, the *inipi*, as well as in the ground supporting it. Finally, *air* entered each time the door was opened."

"Grandmother says that you've understood," Meera said. "She's asking me to tell you that the word *inipi* means, to live again. The purpose of the ceremony is to symbolically unite the elements in order to give those involved the experience of spiritual rebirth. Like a child coming out of his mother's womb, you are born again from the womb of Mother Earth. The *inipi* is the womb. The darkness inside represents humankind's ignorance. The steam serves as the creative force of the Universe in action. Meanwhile, the fire is *peta owihankeshni* or eternal fire. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"You're trying to uncover the relationship between these four elements and those taught by your science. She's saying that such a relationship does, in fact, exist."

"Please, tell me how I can establish this relationship. I believe that each of the two sources of knowledge—the traditional as well as the modern—has a lot to offer, but we lack the bridge to link them."

"You'll have to seek inspiration from the medicine wheel. Do you see the circle of rocks at your feet? Sit and concentrate on the pattern. As you do, ask the Creator to bestow upon you the inspiration you desire."

A medicine wheel had been laid out on the dry grass. In the centre was a buffalo's skull, which David immediately associated with the Creator. On their way to Pine Ridge the previous day, Meera had told him, "In our language we call the Creator, *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Mystery."

David could see an arrangement of seven rocks circling the Creator. Intuitively, he related them to the seven red-hot volcanic rocks placed in the central pit of the sweat lodge during each of the four door openings of the *inipi* ceremony.



"These seven rocks represent Mother Earth, Father Sun, Grandmother Moon, the Tortoise Clan, the Frog Clan, the Thunderbird Clan, and the Butterfly Clan," said Meera as if reading his thoughts. "Grandmother says that the four elements you're

studying are present in the four clans, and she wants to know whether you can identify them.”

“I suppose that the tortoise clan represents *earth*; the frog clan, *water*; the thunderbird clan, *fire*; and the butterfly clan, *air*,” answered David.

“Do you recognise the elements in any other part of the wheel?”

“In the four directions defined by the cross-shaped arms, but I wouldn’t know which direction corresponds to which element,” said the young man.

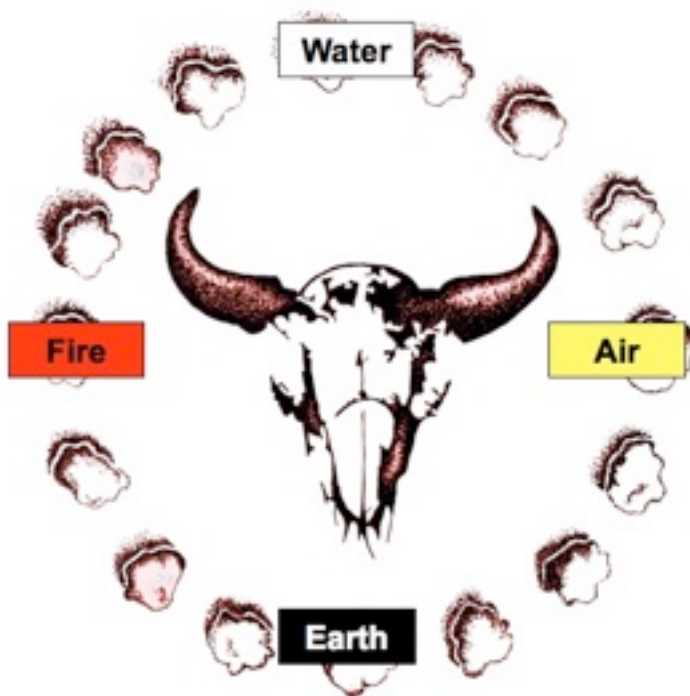
“Grandmother said that the relationship between directions, colours and elements varies depending on who you ask, but then she said that she already told you about a possible arrangement a long time ago. She says that if you ask the stones they’ll remind you.” Meera looked confused as she related these last words because she didn’t know what the matriarch was referring to. David immediately understood and this encouraged him to continue trusting his intuition while questioning the stones.

Silently, he approached the three rocks pointing toward the east. Touching them, he said, “The East is symbolic of the Teacher and the *air* element. It is represented by the colour yellow.”

He approached the three rocks pointing south and said, “The South represents the Healer and the *earth* element. It is associated with the colour black.

He followed the direction outlined by the Sun in the northern hemisphere and placed his hands on the rocks pointing west. “The West symbolises the Visionary one and the element of *fire*. It is represented by the colour red.”

Finally, he touched the three rocks pointing north and said, “The North symbolises the Peacemaker and the *water* element. It is represented by the colour white.”



Meera’s grandmother smiled, but this was no regular smile; it was the expression of a mother who felt proud of her child’s achievements. She was pleased that David could recall teachings learned in a previous life. Meera seemed to catch on and smiled, too. They were silent for a few minutes, and the three looked at each other as though they had been reunited after a long time apart.

David was the first to speak. “The problem is that there are more than a hundred chemical elements, and I don’t know how to go about connecting these to the four you told me about.”

Meera's grandmother took David by his hand and led him to the centre of the wheel where she guided him to touch the buffalo's skull.

"Ask *Wakan Tanka*," she said.

It was the first time he had heard her say a word in a language other than Lakota. As David knelt and touched the animal's skull with his hands, he tried emptying his mind of all thoughts, hoping to make room for a possible answer.

It came to him as a sudden insight, an idea seeding itself in his mind and expanding his consciousness. David realised that once an insight broadened one's awareness, nothing remained the same. "Over ninety-five percent of the biosphere is made up of four chemical elements!" he exclaimed. He rose, taking his hands from the skull. They are: hydrogen (H), carbon (C), nitrogen (N), and oxygen (O)."<sup>55</sup>

"What else did the Creator say to you?" Meera asked, visibly excited.

"Each of them is found mostly in one of the four elements of antiquity."

"And is that so?"

"Let me think. I'll begin with the *earth* element. Earth is found mainly in the Earth's surface. The Earth crust is forty-six percent oxygen.<sup>56</sup> We find oxygen chiefly in silicates, which make up the most abundant group of minerals.

"Then there's the element of *air*. The Earth's atmosphere is seventy-eight percent nitrogen, so this seems to be its element.

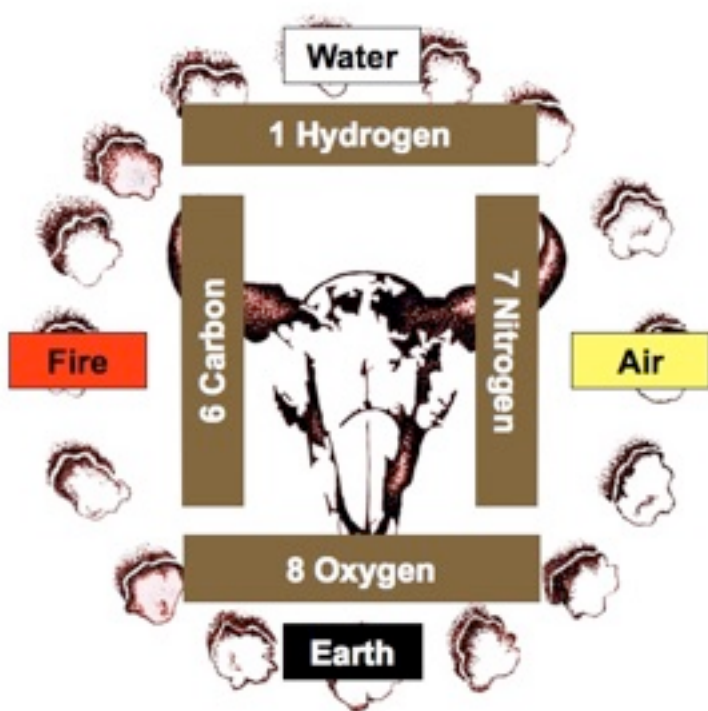
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<sup>55</sup> Smil, Vaclav. *The Earth's Biosphere: Evolution, Dynamics and Change*. Boston: The MIT Press. (2002):28.

<sup>56</sup> Krauskopf, K B. *Introduction to Geochemistry*, New York: McGrawHill, 1979.

“In regards to *water*, two out of the three atoms in a water molecule are hydrogen. In fact, the name, ‘hydrogen’ derives from Greek, and means water (*hydro*) generator (*gen*), because when you burn hydrogen it is water itself that it produces.

“Finally, we are left with the element of *fire*, and carbon. In life, carbon serves as a combustible because it contains what we call, carbohydrates. Also, it’s the primary constituent of fossil fuels, otherwise known as hydrocarbons.”



Though Meera’s grandmother could not catch the specific details of what David was saying, she nevertheless knew that he had achieved his objective in connecting the four elements of antiquity to those he called, “the chemical elements”. Being a spiritual woman, she knew that shamanic cultures throughout the

world considered *earth, water, air, and fire* to be their four grandparents and the parents of Father Sun and Mother Earth. And so, if David had really managed to identify four equivalents in this other area of knowledge called, science, they could also function as the four grandparents or, in other words, the fundamental components of life. To confirm this, she asked David to turn his attention once again to the centre of the medicine wheel.

“The centre!” David exclaimed as though reading the intentions behind her request. Why didn’t I think of that before! The combination of these four elements produces life.<sup>57</sup> Peptide bonds, made from the combination of the four elements (CO–NH), are the building blocks of proteins, including nucleic acid, which produces DNA. In other words, most of life is made up of a combination of water, carbohydrates, and proteins, which all use oxygen to generate the energy necessary to live and move around. It is produced from the right combination of the four elements. So it’s true that the whole cannot be perceived as the mere sum of its parts.”

“Grandmother says that your science seems to yield satisfactory answers as well, and she is happy. She says that, aside from answers, knowledge, if it is to be useful, has to be able to bring solutions. She wants to ensure that your science is not just another thing that will contribute to the current imbalance; but that it instead uses knowledge to restore balance. With this in

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<sup>57</sup> The human body is made up of 63% hydrogen atoms, 24% oxygen atoms, 12% carbon atoms, and 0.58% nitrogen atoms. Source: [Freitas Jr., Robert A. “Nanomedicine”, *Landes Bioscience*. (1999): Tables 3–1 & 3–2.] The mass percentage of elements contained in it includes: 65% oxygen, 18% carbon, 10% hydrogen, and 3% nitrogen. Source: [Thomas J. Glover, comp.. *Littleton: Sequoia*, Pocket Ref, 3rd ed (2003):324]

mind, she wants to know if, after everything you've learned today, you can better understand the current imbalances."

"Let me think about it," David said. After a moment he went on. "Obviously an imbalance is created every time we upset one of the element's natural cycles."

"Can you explain it with an example?" Meera asked.

"Take, for instance, the nitrogen cycle. It takes place between *air* and *earth* but also includes the *water* element. As we've already seen, a huge portion of nitrogen lies in the atmosphere where it forms  $N_2$ . In other words, two atoms of nitrogen bonded together constitute a single molecule. Some species of bacteria living on the ground—or symbiotically with plants—combine atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen to create ammonia ( $NH_3$ ). Subsequently, other bacteria convert ammonia into nitrite ( $NO_2$ ) and then into nitrates ( $NO_3$ ), all of which are absorbed by plants. Plants go on to use these elements to make amino acids. So, you could say that nitrogen is transferred from *air* to *earth*."

"That's so complicated!" Meera exclaimed.

"It's actually really simple. I'll explain it another way. Along with the three other elements, nitrogen is one of the fundamental components of life. It's present in the air, and the only way of making it edible is to first mix it with hydrogen (*water*), and then oxygen (*earth*). Once that's done, plants are able to feed on it."

"I see. So, herbivores eat the plants and absorb the nitrogen, while carnivores eat the herbivores—so we all end up assimilating nitrogen?"

"Yes! Animals consume it and excrete the excess. Or, both plants and animals die, and, through their decomposition, nitrogen is returned to the earth. There it is either absorbed by another plant

or it returns to the air as an  $N_2$  inert gas, thereby completing the nitrogen cycle.”

“When does an imbalance occur?”

### ✦ Myth of Carbon Pollution ✦

“When organic residues, whether they’re from plants or animals, end up as garbage in landfills, or when our faeces and urine are dumped into sewers. It creates imbalance because, in all of these cases, we remove organic nitrogen from the cycle. To compensate for this loss, we then fertilise the soil with inorganic nitrogen obtained from ammonia, which is produced by combining atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen obtained from natural gas.

“Because our society poorly manages animal manure; because it soaks the soil with inorganic fertilisers; because it only sows a single type of crop—especially legumes such as soybeans<sup>58</sup>—our soil becomes saturated with nitrogen. Then, when it rains, most of this nitrogen ends up contaminating our hydrological resources. Our waters are polluted with algae; this is the source of the overall imbalance of the ecosystem. This problem is of such magnitude in our country that agricultural residues are now the largest contaminants of rivers and streams.”<sup>59</sup>

“How can agriculture, which has been in practice for thousands of years and is meant to increase the soil’s fertility be the largest pollutant of our waters?” asked Meera.

“The answer lies in the green revolution of the 60s, when pesticides and inorganic fertilisers were used, and intensive single-crop farming became the dominant practice.”

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<sup>58</sup> Leguminous plants absorb atmospheric nitrogen and fix it into the ground.

<sup>59</sup> EPA. “Protecting Water Quality from Agricultural Runoff” *EPA Fact Sheet*. March 2005.

“Has any other cycle been upset?” the girl asked.

“Well, when one cycle becomes imbalanced, the others tend to follow. For instance, high concentrations of nitrogen in our waters prompt the growth of phytoplankton and algae, at the expense of other, more complex, organisms. This results in a series of environmental problems, such as ‘hypoxia’—or the reduction of oxygen. Then, once these organisms have exhausted all the nutrients, they die, and their decay consumes the oxygen that remains. This causes fish and crustaceans to drown. So, the nitrogen in the water displaces the oxygen, causing the death of animal life.”

“Triggering an imbalance in the oxygen cycle,” said Meera.

“Right. But it’s not only the imbalance of the nitrogen cycle that affects the oxygen cycle. It also has to do with the imbalance of the carbon cycle.”

“What do you mean?” the girl asked.

“Through photosynthesis, carbon is transferred from either *air* or *water*, to *fire*. Plants, through sunlight, convert water ( $\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ) and carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) into carbohydrates ( $\text{C}_n\text{H}_{2n}\text{O}_n$ ) and oxygen ( $\text{O}_2$ ).<sup>60</sup> The carbon in the *air* and *water* elements—as  $\text{CO}_2$ —is then transferred to *fire* as a carbohydrate ( $\text{C}_n\text{H}_{2n}\text{O}_n$ ). The opposite occurs in chemical processes referred to as reduction-oxidation reaction or ‘redox’. An example of this is the cellular respiration through which oxygen and carbohydrates are converted back into carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2$ ) and water.<sup>61</sup> Another example of redox is the internal combustion engine, which uses hydrocarbon to obtain energy. In exchange, it releases  $\text{CO}_2$  and water, along with several

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<sup>60</sup> The formula for this reaction is:  $\text{CO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O} + \text{photons} \rightarrow \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + \text{O}_2$ .

<sup>61</sup> The formula for this reaction is:  $\text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6 \text{O}_2 \rightarrow 6 \text{CO}_2 + 6 \text{H}_2\text{O}$ .

contaminants. The abuse of reduction-oxidation causes imbalance in the cycle.”

“How?”

“To begin with, by the emission of pollutants. But it’s also because of the release of CO<sub>2</sub>. As a gas, CO<sub>2</sub> is needed, but only in very small quantities. For instance, only 0.038% of the earth’s atmosphere is made up of this gas, and there’s an even smaller percentage in water.<sup>62</sup> However, when we burn fossil fuels we’re transferring carbon—which is supposed to be safely stored in the *fire* element—to *water* and *air*.”

“And what’s the effect of this imbalance?” asked Meera.

“It causes a reduction in the amount of oxygen in the environment and an increase in CO<sub>2</sub>. Bear in mind that every carbon atom contains two oxygen atoms. In fact, nearly thirteen percent of the atmospheric oxygen produced by the plant kingdom each year is consumed with the burning of fossil fuels.<sup>63</sup> So, we find that carbon does the same thing in the air which nitrogen does in water. That is, it displaces oxygen. In this case, the *fire* element (carbon) is displacing the *earth* element (oxygen).”

“How do we fix this?” she asked.

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<sup>62</sup> A mere 0.0028% of seawater is carbon.

<sup>63</sup> According to Walker, J. C. G. *The Oxygen Cycle in the Natural Environment and the Biogeochemical Cycles*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1980, terrestrial plants released an estimated  $16.5 \times 10^{13}$  kg O<sub>2</sub> when they performed photosynthesis in the year 1980. It was presumed that this would remain invariable. In the same year, the burning of fossil fuels consumed a total of  $1.2 \times 10^{13}$  kg O<sub>2</sub>. Updated statistics from the International Energy Agency show that the figure now stands at  $2.1 \times 10^{13}$  kg O<sub>2</sub>. This data refers to the 29.3 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, which the IEA published as the total emissions of 2008 in their publication, CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions from Fuel Combustion 2010. By comparing their atomic weight, we see that 72% of CO<sub>2</sub> is oxygen, which means that 21.3 billion tons of oxygen was consumed. The outcome of dividing 2.1 by 16.5 is 12.72%.

“Governments and the large financial conglomerates—true to their reductionist attitude—are trying to solve this problem by imposing a tax on carbon. Bear in mind that when all human, animals, and plants exhale they release CO<sub>2</sub>, so this, to me, seems no different to imposing a tax on breathing. Personally, the only solution I see possible is restoring balance to the cycles.”

“How?”

“Re-establishing the nitrogen cycle means setting up the practice of organic agriculture, which will cease the depletion of the soil and the pollution of the environment. A richer, more fertile soil will also be able to hold and maintain a larger quantity of atmospheric carbon. For the carbon cycle to be restored we also need to stop using fossil fuels. If we succeed in restoring balance to these two cycles, it will be transferred to the oxygen cycle as well.”

“Would this solve the problem?” Meera asked.

“No, but it would be a good start. There are plenty of other cycles which have been disrupted by the eighty-thousand or so chemical substances currently being used in industrial processes<sup>64</sup>. For instance, there’s the whole range of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). Out of these there’s what’s known as ‘the dirty dozen’, many of which were and continue to be used as pesticides. All twelve of these contain the chemical element of chlorine (Cl). In its original state, chlorine exists mainly as chloride. It is a component of salt, which is found in greatest amounts diluted in the ocean. But now we’ve incorporated salt into many of these

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<sup>64</sup> At the beginning of the 90s, there were 70,000, as stated by Pullen, S. and Hurst, P. “Marine Pollution Prevention”. *WWF Background Report*. Gland, Switzerland: World Wide Fund for Nature, (1993): 3–7. According to the World Resources Institute *World resources 1987*. Washington, D.C.: WRI, 1987, this number has been increasing by several thousand each year. Presumably, this growth will be exponential. At the time the story takes place (1999), the number is estimated at an approximated 80,000.

persistent pollutants, which are circulated throughout the environment.”

“Would this account for other disrupted cycles?” Meera asked.

“Yes. However, not only do we face risks caused by breaking the cycles of the chemical elements; we also face those associated with nanotechnology and genetic engineering. It’s possible that these two alone will cause massive contamination of our foods, and the potential catastrophe is even more unpredictable than that caused by the chemical components. Imposing a tax on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions won’t resolve these other dangers. It will only distract our attention from them, and lead us to believe that something is actually being done about the problem.”



David paused and all three reflected on the seriousness of the situation. Meera’s grandmother was first to break the silence. “When humankind distances itself from Nature, its heart becomes hard,” she said in broken English.

“How can we restore the balance?” David asked her.

“Grandmother says that you belong to the Thunderbird clan, which resides in the west and is ruled by *fire*. You and your clan members are meant to be visionaries—to weave the future. However, this future has to be agreed upon by the other three clans as well as by the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms. We, the Lakota, spring from the union between the tortoise and the butterfly clans; between the elements of *earth* and *air*—oxygen and nitrogen,” Meera said with a smile. “We came to nurture, and we fulfil this role by healing and imparting wisdom. Then there’s the Frog clan, which is associated with the *water* element. In order to

help maintain peace and do honour to their name<sup>65</sup>, people from the Frog clan must not let themselves be intimidated by those who seek to provoke them.”

“How can I get all the clans to listen to your wisdom?” asked the young man.

“Grandmother says that you are, *heyoka*—he who acts contrary to mainstream conditioning. Your role is to do the opposite of what conventional belief deems so that you might awaken society. As a *heyoka*, you are the human counterpart of the Thunder Beings, also known as, ‘the Star People’, ‘Elders’ or ‘Tall Ones’. They have the power to dissolve the existing order and use its parts to create a new one. But before you’ll be able to find out what this new arrangement is, you must have a vision. Without it you won’t know where to channel your efforts. Grandmother says you’ll be given the vision you need during the *hanbleceya* ritual.”

“*Hanbleceya*?”

“It literally means, ‘to cry for a vision’, but it’s usually translated as, ‘vision quest.’”<sup>66</sup> It’s one of our seven sacred rites<sup>67</sup>, brought to us by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. Grandmother is also saying to me that you don’t seem ready to participate in this ceremony. She wants to know your age.”

“I’ve just turned twenty-eight,” he replied.

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<sup>65</sup> The word Islam has its roots in *Salama*, meaning ‘peace’.

<sup>66</sup> *Hanble* means, ‘vision’ or ‘dream’, while *ceya* means, ‘cry for’.

<sup>67</sup> The six others are as follows: *wanagi wicagluha*, ritual to keep the spirit around; *wiwanang wacipi*, sun gazing dance; *inikagapi*, the sweat lodge; *isnati awicalowanpi*, female puberty ceremony; *hunka*, forming relationships; and *tapa wankaiyeya*, the sacred ball game. Cited from: Powers, Marla N. *Oglala Women, Myth, Ritual, and Reality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

“She says you need to wait for as many years as the number of moons in a year.”

“That’s thirteen years. I have to wait until 2012.”

“Yes. She says that both you and your society need to be ready for this vision. If it comes before the time is right it’ll be of no use because you won’t know what to do with it, or how to interpret it. She says you will need to play an active role in the vision. So, you must be spiritually mature enough to be able to enter the place where a very special conversation will take place,” Meera said.

“Where is this place?” David asked.

“The world we live in is only a shadow of the real world. The place grandmother is referring to lies in the real world. To gain entrance you have to travel beyond the world of your dreams, beyond the Moon,” the girl translated.

David was pensive. Beyond the world of my dreams, he thought. Beyond the Moon...Where is she talking about?

Meera’s grandmother took a sacred pipe from the cloth bag on her shoulder and offered it to David. He didn’t know what to do.

“In our language we call it, *chanupa*. You and your people know it as, ‘calumet’ or the sacred pipe,” Meera said.

David received it, carefully and respectfully, with both hands. He bowed his head in appreciation.

“Always keep a little white sage in the bowl so that nothing—physical or spiritual—can get into it. The pipe is symbolic of yourself. Its stem remains empty, inviting the Creator’s breath to flow within. When you smoke it during a ritual, you’ll be sending your prayers to *Wakan Tanka*, the Great Mystery, to be heard. Grandmother says that during these thirteen years, you’ll have to pray every day—not only for your well-being, but also for the well-

being of all nations. She says that you'll have to work hard for the common good without being attached to the outcome. She asserts that, not she, but John will be there. He'll become the new chief. When you return, you must bring the pipe to him. First, you must offer it to the Four Directions. Then, offer it to Father Sky, Mother Earth, and finally to John. If, during the next thirteen years, you do everything that grandmother is asking of you, John will know. He'll be able to read it in your heart. If you do, he'll accept the pipe, and it'll mean that he's agreeing to take on the responsibility of guiding you in your vision quest and taking you to the place grandmother described.<sup>68</sup>

### 🕯️ A The Vision Quest

OVER THE FOLLOWING thirteen years many things changed, both in the world as well as in David's life. As his old lab colleague had predicted, David spent some time in various New Mexico communities. He wrote articles for spiritual magazines. He also did a lot more. David travelled abroad; learned new languages; worked in different jobs; fell in love; and even had a daughter. There were times when he was penniless, but this did not bother him much because he knew that the Universe, the Great Mystery, would always come to his rescue. The only constant element in his life was his short morning ritual. He would begin by offering the pipe to the four directions, then to Father Sky, and then to Mother Earth. Finally, he would sit with his legs crossed, facing east. He would then take the pipe in his hands and begin praying and meditating.

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<sup>68</sup> Inspiration for David's vision quest comes from the writings of William Walk Sacred. "Vision Quest" 2009 *Native Americans Online*. Spiritalk Gathering <<http://www.native-americans-online.com/native-american-vision.html>>

Having repeated this routine, not hundreds, but thousands of times, David finally found himself performing it one day with John as witness. On this occasion, the only difference was that, instead of sitting and meditating with the pipe, he now offered it to the man who had been his father in a previous life. All of this took place on an afternoon during the summer solstice of 2012—six months before the famous date the whole world was talking about. John accepted the pipe. Then the two men embraced, and John whispered, “I’ve been waiting for you all this time, my son.”

The next day, they performed the *inipi* ceremony, but this time only John and David participated—the teacher and his student. The same firekeeper, now a grown man, kindled the fire. John sat in the east, near to the door, while David sat in the opposite direction—in the west.

Once the ceremony was over, the two men remained in silence. Then John, David, and the firekeeper set out for where the vision quest was to take place. None of the men spoke, for they did not want to disrupt the profound feeling of peace that had come over them.

On the way, they stopped to visit John’s sister and brother-in-law. Then, after three more hours of driving, they arrived at the farm that they would need to cross to get to the ancient volcano, Inyan Kara. First, they let the farmer know that they had come. Then, they drove on, to park right among the foothills of the mountain.

The firekeeper stayed in the car while John and David began their climb. Once they reached the top of the mountain, they headed down the side of what looked like an old crater, which seemed to contain a higher hill at its centre.

John and David stopped among the vegetation at the lowest point of the crater, a place that remained sheltered from the

elements. This was a site hidden from all of those who would be unwilling to venture into such a hostile environment.

Handing David a blanket, John told him to get undressed. He then proceeded to put up four ceremonial flags—one for each direction—and asked David to sit between them, at the centre. Here he raised a small altar made out of an eagle's feather, a shell, a cherry branch from Virginia, and a red flannel. John then told David to take up the sacred pipe. He explained that David was only to leave the sacred spot to perform his bodily functions and that, over the following four days, he was to pray without ceasing.<sup>69</sup>

"On the fourth day I'll return. But don't be afraid because I'll always be with you. I'm going back to the reservation where I'll spend the next four days praying for you. So I'll be by your side on your journey, just as the magpie perches on the buffalo's back and accompanies him on his."

John stood in silence for a moment. When he spoke his voice was grave and he looked David in the eye. "What you came here to do is not only important for you, but for the future of us all. Your first task will be to carry out a dialog in a place that lies beyond the world of dreams, a place that dwells in the realm of thought. When you've done this, the flame from that dialogue will be able to descend, first into the world of dreams, and then into this reality, which we call, 'the material world'.

"There are two reasons why this conversation must be initiated by you—the representative of your clan. Firstly, because your clan is the one that broke the agreement to begin with. Secondly, because, as visionaries—associated with the element of *fire*, and inhabitants of the West—you're the only ones who are able to call forth the Thunder Beings. It's been a long time since they've paid

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<sup>69</sup> Idem

heed to us, and they won't intervene unless they see that those who've broken the agreement are spiritually mature enough to restore it. Do you follow?"

"Yes."

"Once the mental space for the meeting is set, it's your duty to invite the representatives from the other clans," John went on. "Remember that, in the beginning, it will only be the four of you; but if your words prove to be wise you'll encourage many more to join in. This will go on until there are sixteen of you, like the sixteen rocks of the outer circle in the medicine wheel; the sixteen willow branches from which we build the *inipi*; and finally, the sixteen personalities adopted by the Creator.<sup>70</sup> Only if you get to this number, and only if your words are truly heartfelt, will you all receive a visit from the woman who is *Wakan*."

"Who is she?" David asked.

"She is the seventeenth and most prominent figure in the medicine wheel. She is the daughter of the sky and the shooting star that brings us hope. A long time ago she lived among us, and we expect her to return—for the benefit of all. We hope she will come back to teach us how to live peacefully, how to respect each other and all nations as well: to guide us into the new time. After a long winter of materialism, which can only end in confusion, this will be a time of peace and harmony. We know her under the name, 'the White Buffalo Calf Woman'. But others remember her under different names, such as, 'Spider Woman', or 'the Water Carrier'. A long time ago, before you were even born to this present life, you

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<sup>70</sup> "The shaman addresses *Wakan Tanka* as *Tobtob Kin*. This is part of the secret language of the shamans.... *Tobtob Kin* are four times four gods... *Wakan Tanka* is like sixteen different persons; but each person is *kan* (sacred)." Source: Walker, J. R. "The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota". *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*. New York, 1916.

were chosen to be the initiator of this reunion, and to make way for her return.”



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John left him then. David was ready to begin one of the seven sacred rites brought to the Lakota community by the White Buffalo Calf Woman. As the Sun began to set, the temperature dropped. David covered himself with the blanket. He sat with his legs crossed and began to chant, “*Maka Ina, Maka Ina*,” meaning “Mother Earth, Mother Earth”.

## 🕷️ The First Night

AFTER A FEW HOURS, David finally fell asleep on the ground. He was naked. The blanket was his only protection against the cold, and a rock was his only pillow. He was accustomed to sleeping on a mattress, so his discomfort woke him shortly afterwards. It was around two in the morning when he left his sanctuary to relieve

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<sup>71</sup> The first image is from Thruston, Gates P. *The Antiquities of Tennessee*. Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, (1897):135 and belongs to the Cherokee Mythology. The second image is a Mississippian ‘Spider’ gorget, from 1000 a.d. In both images Spider Woman is surrounded by a circle made out of seventeen perforations or stripes.

himself. He then sat between the four flags once again, ready to resume his prayer and meditation. Two hours later, his back ached so badly that he decided to lie down again, but this time he did not want to sleep. He only wished to relax his muscles.

Twenty minutes later, as he was falling asleep, David was overcome by a pleasant sensation of lightness. He felt himself rise and become suspended about three feet over his physical body. Looking to his left, he saw John, also levitating in his subtle body. John stretched out his hand and David took it. He allowed John to lead him to a dark place—the darkest place he had ever been. Here was a region that, were you to locate it somewhere on Earth, would be deep within the planet's crust. John disappeared, leaving David alone in this pitch-black hole.

David was not the only one here. A cluster of spectral shadows appeared on all sides, surrounding him. They advanced on David at lightning speed to loom over him, their jaws gnashing. Like moths drawn to a single point of light in a dismal place, they flocked to him, but David was not scared. Experience had taught him that the best way to avoid being attacked by a dog was to display no fear. *Fear attracts danger and makes us vulnerable*, he recalled. He knew that John had brought him there to test him. He remained still and began emanating a strong feeling of compassion towards the shadows. He felt sorry for these sorrowful souls who had fallen so low that they were now trapped in this dark place. David's compassion lifted him out.

Shortly afterwards, he found himself in another astral space. He was standing on a bridge that passed over a dry riverbed. This place was grey—very grey. It was lit in the same way as a night with a full moon. It had a certain decadent feel to it, like a once great, but now crumbling city. In this place, there were no smells or colours; there was no sun or vegetation to be seen.

David called, "Please, let there be light!"—but his pleas were in vain. Then, he spotted a group of people walking listlessly towards him. They did not respond to his cries; it was as though they were absent, as if they had no will, and a limited consciousness. David approached one, a man, and noticed with a shock that his face was hideously disfigured. "Who are you?" he asked.

"I, who am I? I don't know..." the man responded, his voice devoid of emotion.

David realised that these people were zombies.

He was so desperate to get out of this place that he walked right through one of the crumbling walls. On the other side he found what seemed to be a different astral realm. He was in an empty room.

At that moment, David realised he was floating in a horizontal position with his arms extended, and felt a strong desire to stand. Then, as if a mere wish was all it took to make something occur in this realm, he suddenly found himself in a vertical position with his knees bent, his feet ready to land. When his momentum ceased, David stretched out his legs, hitting the ground with his heels. A tickle ran through his muscles, which he recognised as the sensation he had felt after meditating in a seated position for a long time. He realised that space, which he had perceived as immaterial just a few moments before, had now turned into solid matter. He would no longer be able to fly or go through walls.

David walked towards the door, and as he got closer he heard what sounded like a thousand voices all murmuring at once. Behind it he found a room full of people standing around talking. Everyone seemed to be speaking at the same time. The room was small, and had no windows; there were only two doors—the one through which he had come, and another on the opposite side. Nudging his way through the crowd, he opened the second door to find another

room with yet more people talking. Here, some were also smoking, others drinking, and some were tangled together on the floor, involved in what looked like a sexual orgy. David decided that he would not talk to anyone. He thought that, like the zombies, these people would have nothing of interest to say. He called this place, “the chambers of chatter.” It was familiar to him because he had been here before—in one of his wet dreams. *Well, I’m not perfect, and I don’t expect that everyone else is either*, he thought.

He realised that the doors would only lead him to yet more rooms just like this. Some would be full of people, others would be empty. So, he decided to take off again and exit through the ceiling. As he rose into flight, he awoke, returning to his physical body.

It was clear to David that a meeting between the four clans was not going to take place in any of the three astral realms he had just visited. In fact, he realised that if peace and harmony was to be attained on Earth, the souls he had just encountered—especially those from the first two realms—would need to stay right where they were for a very long time without being reincarnated.

“*Wakan Tanka*, Great Mystery, we can strive to better ourselves and initiate the promised new time, but getting there also depends on the spiritual evolution of the souls you send us!”

The Sun was rising, and an eagle began circling right above David’s head, as though *Wakan Tanka* had heard his plea. He extended his arms, certain that his prayer had been received. *Wambli Gleska*, messenger to *Wakan Tanka*, had made an appearance.

## ✦ Legend of the Badlands ✦<sup>72</sup>

The eagle reminded David of the story John's brother-in-law had told him the previous day. His name was Tired Eagle and he was a native of Minnesota. The couple lived in the small village of Red Shirt, halfway between Pine Ridge and the sacred mountain. The place wasn't any more than twenty houses in size, some of them mobile. The midday Sun had smothered the whole village, but even so, it had been pleasant to stop, relax and take in his fascinating story. Tired Eagle had talked about the beginning of the badlands, or wastelands, which extended from the east of that village as far as the eye could see.

"Many winters ago, humans offended *Unktehi*, the water spirit and mother to all bad beings," Tired Eagle had said. "Because of this, *Unktehi* declared war upon us, causing the rivers to rise above the banks and flood everything. Everyone scrambled for safety to the tops of the mountains, but even there they weren't secure. The waters swept them away, until it was red from their blood. Then *Wambli Gleska*, the Great Golden Eagle, felt pity for us humans, and decided to take action. Because he was only one, and many were dying, he knew that he would have to choose a single person to save. He decided on a woman who was running away from the flood. Diving down upon her, he carefully snatched her up, lifting and delivering her to safety." Tired Eagle imitated the bird's plummeting flight with his hands.

"At first the woman was very sad, having lost her fellows," he went on. "But as time went by, she accepted what had happened and even fell in love with *Wambli Gleska*. They had children together who grew up to be strong and healthy, and *Wakan Tanka* was very pleased to see that not all of humanity had perished. As

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<sup>72</sup> Inspired by: Palmer, Jessica Dawn *The Dakota peoples: a history of the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota through 1863*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, (2008):39.

he was still angered by what *Unktehi* had done, he decided to turn her into stone. Now her bones make up the badlands stretching towards the east. Her back became the ridge, and her vertebrae can still be seen in the red and yellow rocks. We are the descendants of the union between *Wambli Gleska* and the last woman to come out alive from the flood. We are the children of the eagle,” the man concluded.

...✚...

*Wambli Gleska, I hope that if I run into trouble you'll save me too,* David thought.

A flock of magpies nesting not far from him did not feel the same way. When they spotted the eagle, one of them let out a sharp cry, and the four pairs became frantic. In an effort to protect their youngsters, the male birds alighted from their nests to fly at the circling eagle. The larger bird took off, deciding it wasn't worth the trouble of having it out with four hysterical magpies—especially on a full stomach. David was impressed. He reflected on how brave the magpies were. This was how he came to understand the true meaning of *Cangleska*, a word John mentioned often and translated as, 'union', 'circle', or 'ring'.

“Clearly, unity is strength”, he said to himself.

## 🐾 The Second Night

ON THE SECOND night, David slept comfortably. It was as though his body had started to get used to the hard ground. Even so, he woke before dawn, and, as he had done the previous night, he began to meditate and pray. An hour later, his aching back forced him to lie back down. And just like the previous night, within a few minutes he felt a light sensation, and a sense of taking flight. David

found himself in a place as dark as the night surrounding him. He could hear the voices of disembodied spirits wandering about. He ignored them, focusing instead on the luminous, greenish-brown wall before him. The wall seemed to be inviting him to cross, so he flew towards it.

On the other side, he found himself flying over a landscape that filled him with awe. It was a majestic city of skyscrapers. Though varying in size, they were all rectangular in structure and greyish in colour. A reddish glow emanated from their huge windows—the only source of light in the space. Like the other realms, this one did not have a sun, nature, fragrances—or even colours. In short, it did not have any of the things that made life pleasant and bearable on Earth.

David did not fly in a straight line across the dark city, but rather in zigzags, as though he had a surfboard under his feet or as though he rode a magic broom or a flying carpet. *Now I know where witches on flying broomsticks, and the carpets in, A Thousand and One Nights come from*, he thought.

As he was contemplating the view and trying to imagine who must live in the buildings, a thought entered his mind: *That's where the children of greed must live; those who never had enough and always wanted more. They spent their whole lives working long hours in sterile environments until stress caused them to have a heart attack and die. And then, they end up here, mentally trapped in their previous routine.*

He flew closer to see if this was true, but when he landed on the exterior wall of one of the skyscrapers, looking for a way to get inside, he found himself in another astral realm. This one seemed to have a higher frequency on the vibrational scale. Also, out of all the places, this one definitely looked the most like Earth. He saw plants, gardens, suburban houses, a lake with boats moored at the dock, and streets with cars—some parked, others on the move.

He drifted towards one of the houses and saw three children playing ball. Their mother was calling them inside to eat, and the neighbours were in their gardens. This was undoubtedly the picture of a typical middle class family. Judging from the model of cars and the way the people were dressed, it seemed to be the 1970s. It all looked so real to David; but it also had such a sense of the surreal that it was hard for him to believe. It was as if he were watching a movie about the decade in which he'd been born.

All of a sudden, he felt a strong desire to talk to the children. Because, in the astral world, he'd found that there was nothing standing between the desire and the action itself, he found himself saying to them: "Do you know that you're dead?" He saw the shock on the children's faces, and the next moment he was being pulled back to his body.

*How silly I am! he thought. What does it mean to be dead? Maybe it would've been better if I'd said: Do you know you're living on the astral plane? But it's clear those children thought their environment solid, real. Only I, a visitor, could perceive it as immaterial. But then, hasn't it been proven that matter is pure vibration? Others come here. They visit us and sense our physical landscape to be intangible too. They don't come to us and say: Do you know that you're dead? In fact, we think they're the dead ones. It wouldn't be surprising if those kids went crying to their mother, saying a spirit just visited them.*

David had learned that if he wished to remain in the astral, he should not interfere or cause any commotion in the realms that opened up to him. This experience also confirmed to him that, on the astral plane, he could materialise any action merely by wishing for it; it was as if nothing stood between the desire itself and the deed.

*That must be why they call them, the realms of desire, he thought. The minute one wishes for something it becomes reality.*

Nevertheless, it was still night, and he wanted to go on travelling. So, he stretched out his body once again and, within a few minutes, he found himself hovering in that dark in-between. Little by little, the darkness around him gave way to the most astonishing landscapes. Beneath him stretched plains of the liveliest colours he had ever seen—radiant greens full of life, bright sky-blues, browns, reds, and yellows—hues which made him gasp in amazement.

When he fixed his gaze on a specific point, the landscape appeared to transmute. New mountains with rivers snaking below formed out of the blue. Right beneath him he noticed a large herd of buffalo running in perfect harmony through vast prairies. They stampeded, first in one direction, and then in another, as though the herd was a single animal. Around them he saw horsemen, which he recognised to be Sioux hunters, charging after the animals to shoot them with arrows. I'm happy to see that at least here they can continue their traditional way of life, he thought.

The flock of magpies pulled him back to the present. As they did every morning at dawn, they began performing their territorial songs. "This is our territory. Stay far away," they seemed to want to say.

It was as though David could understand what they were saying. Aside from the magpies, his stomach's rumblings did not let him rest. On this, the second day, everything became harder for him to bear. He even thought about going down to the farm nearby to ask the owner for something to eat, but then he pictured the disappointment on John's face. "I will not be worthy of the responsibility entrusted to me if I give up on the second day," he said to himself.

By afternoon, his hunger became more bearable, as if his body had also become used to the lack of food. However, he was still

terribly thirsty. Luckily John, fully aware of what he was doing, had selected a spot that was shaded by a rock. And so, even though it was a blisteringly hot day, David did not run the risk of becoming dehydrated. John had also left him a canteen of water in case he believed that he needed it. "Hunger won't kill you, but if you need water don't think twice about drinking it. The Sun is so hot at the end of June that you can become dehydrated in a matter of hours," John had told him.

While David lay down to sleep that night, the moon was almost in full view. He thought to himself, *Maybe I got a little closer to her today....*

Within a few minutes, he was sound asleep.

### 🦉 The Third Night

IT WAS AFTER one in the morning when David awoke. Upon opening his eyes, the first thing he saw was Vega winking down at him from the Lyra constellation. Vega appeared to be dancing upon his head, just as *Wambli Gleska*, the eagle, had done on the first morning.

*I don't think this eagle will be hounded by magpies*, he thought with a smile.<sup>73</sup>

David was to discover a few hours later that it was best not to underestimate magpies, but at this moment they were sleeping, and Vega brightened the cosmos from the tip of the ancient volcano.

It was not long before David was again taken over by the same light sensation that had lead to his flight night after night. Even as

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<sup>73</sup> In many cultures Vega is associated with the eagle.

he became aware of it, he realised that he was already suspended in mid-air, enveloped by the darkness of the night. As it had been in each instance, he heard the voices of roaming spirits in this moment of transition, but this time he paid them no heed. A few seconds later, he passed through this in-between realm, and entered the astral.

Like a cinema at the opening of a film, the voices became hushed and the darkness gave way to a range of majestic snow-capped mountains. At their feet stood a captivating city, which seemed to have been built to defy the law of gravity. It was like no other that David had seen before, and seemed to be taken straight out of a fairy tale. From behind the buildings a huge waterfall cascaded into a crystalline lake which was surrounded by many houses. Other dwellings stood against the cliff face, while still more were built onto the cliff itself, at the midpoint of the falls. Their foundations were perched upon what tiny horizontal surfaces the rock offered. The masonry was outstanding. While the vaults, arches, and buttresses created a gothic look, the organic shapes added a touch of art nouveau. David also noticed domed buildings here and there, which reminded him of Byzantine architecture. It looks like the residents here entertain themselves by creating beauty and harmony, he thought. What an enchanting place to live!

David turned to look at a corbel on one of the roofs. A dragon made of stone protruded from it, forming part of the eave. He realised that if he fixed his attention on the figure he could modify it of his own will. *Now I know how they built all of this*, he thought. *In this world it seems to be much easier to turn our imaginings into tangible objects.*

David returned the eave to its original design. He did not want the people to become angry with him for altering the harmony of the architecture, which they so obviously cared for. He flew over

the streets then, seeing people engrossed in all kinds of trade and art. Some were painting, while others sculpted. They did not use brushes or chisels, but instead merely projected their creative ideas directly onto the canvas or block of stone. Others were involved in the trades, or played musical instruments in the streets. David decided to call this place, the City of Artists.

He noticed a group of people erecting a new building, and overheard a heated debate among them about whether the dome should be built according to the Byzantine, Gothic, or art nouveau style.

*I doubt whether they'd like a geodesic dome, he joked to himself.*

Though there was no chance of finding them in this place, David did come across geodesic style buildings on the other side of the mountain range. This was clearly a different realm, a very dry place—almost desert-like. Scattered across the land was a group of small one-story houses. Adjacent to each one was a predominantly geodesic style greenhouse used to grow vegetables. The houses themselves reminded David of the structures known as ‘earthships’<sup>74</sup>, which he had visited in Taos County while living in New Mexico. But the ones below him, unlike those he had seen, had not been made of concrete. Instead, they had been built out of bricks formed of natural polymers extracted from vegetable fibres and other earthen materials like adobe, stone, and straw-bale.

The houses were isolated. He could see no access routes, no electricity wires or telephone cables, and no other infrastructure linking them to the outside world. In fact, they seemed to be completely self-sufficient in every way. The roofs were coated in a special paint that could turn solar radiation into electricity. The houses themselves were of well thought-out passive solar

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<sup>74</sup> The ‘earthship’ was conceived of and created by Mike Reynolds, the visionary architect.

architecture, and were equipped with atmospheric water generators, bio-digesters to generate biogas, and solar cookers. A vehicle was parked at the side of every building. These did not have wheels, but appeared to be able to levitate using an anti-gravity system.

*Those who haven't been born yet live here. They're discovering and applying the technological solutions of the future,* he thought. *And there are those who visit in their dreams so that they might start implementing such innovations on Earth.* The second thought sprang into his mind, as though someone else had put it there.

He flew over the area and then came upon an ocean clothed in shades of emerald. The foam from the waves created stunning formations, as if they were alive. Dolphins leaped up from the crests to greet him, and even a flock of birds came to receive him. He had the feeling that he was approaching a very special place. When he reached the coast, he saw a huge cliff. It was so tall that he had to adjust his course to a vertical ascent. A waterfall trailed from it which he followed up, until he broke through the clouds and reached a sunny plateau. Its formation reminded him of a *tepui* he had seen in the Guiana Highlands, in the northeast of South America.

As he flew over the plateau, he saw a forest at its centre enveloping the lake that fed the waterfall. People gathered in groups of five around the lake. One in each group seemed to be the teacher, while the others listened. To David, the landscape appeared untouched. There were no roads or buildings, nothing altering the environment or suggesting the presence of humans. It seemed to him that these people had made sure to leave everything exactly as they had found it. *This is where I should be!* he thought, and at that moment, he woke up.

He had returned once again to his body, and was lying inside the crater of the ancient volcano. Vega still shone over his head, so he knew that not much time had passed since the start of his astral journey. The last three places he had visited were still fresh in his mind.

“First, it was the city of artists, where people with strong artistic inclinations developed their skills. Then, it was the desert of futuristic houses, where technologies still to come are designed and created. Those who reside there, or visit it in dreams, have decided to confront the future challenges of humanity with better technology. As he gazed at the star, he also realised that this reality would only materialise on the Earth’s surface when Vega shifted a few degrees to the north. “Finally, it was the *tepui* of knowledge, where the masters share their wisdom with us. We’re going to have to wait even longer before this reality can become fully manifest on our planet—almost until Vega returns to being our polar star,” he said.

After this, he fell asleep once again. When he awoke, the Sun was already rising above the peak of the ancient volcano. He felt neither hungry nor thirsty. He was not tired either. In fact, he had never felt so energetic. It was as if he could absorb the energy he needed from the very air he breathed. He was refreshed and felt like taking a walk. But then he remembered that John had asked him not to leave this spot, or to cross the four flags for any reason other than to perform his bodily functions. His body did not call for this, as he had disposed of everything without replacing his liquids or food. So, he could not even use this excuse.

As he thought of these things, he heard the sound of two men talking. He wanted privacy, to be left alone to think or, rather, so that he didn’t have to think. He just wanted to be by himself. Above all, he did not want to have to answer questions about what he was

doing or how long he would be staying there. He knew that if the voices belonged to Native Americans they would understand and respect him, leaving him alone without asking questions. He was concerned; however, that they might instead be rangers or lost tourists.

His worries became real—two rangers approached. To get to this place one had to cross private property, which was why very few people ventured here. John had obtained permission from the owner; however, this had allowed him to cross the farmland, not to spend four days camping—and especially not to walk around wearing nothing but a blanket. He could hide, but it was more than likely that the men would find the ceremonial flags and altar, and know that someone was there. Then, he remembered what John had said: "As long as you stay within the four flags, you'll be safe."

*Yes, but safe from what?* David reasoned that John must have been referring to the spirits of the in-between place, or the wild animals that were likely to be here. Surely it didn't include protection from arrest by the authorities if they felt he had broken the law. Amidst his doubts, David decided to cross his legs and meditate.

The rangers were getting closer, but before they came upon his sacred circle, the magpies began to squawk. The two men had entered their nesting area, provoking them to swoop down and scare them from their territory. Swearing and ducking their heads, the rangers walked the other way. *Those magpies are alright*, David thought. He felt relieved, and smiled up at the birds in gratitude. John had been right. As long as he stayed in the protected area he did not need to worry...

## ☯ The Fourth Night

IT WAS THE last night, and David could not sleep. It wasn't worry that kept him awake, but the fasting, because it had left him with too much energy. Since his body was no longer extracting sustenance from food, it had found a new source of nourishment in the vital energy from the air. To the yogis this was known as, 'prana', to the Taoists, 'qi'. He could feel the energy flowing through his entire body, and it kept him awake. Hours went by, and Vega once again reached its zenith—it was past midnight.

### ✚ Legend of the Great Race ✚<sup>75</sup>

Suddenly, he heard a magpie warbling. *That's strange*, he thought. *Usually they don't start until dawn*. The bird continued its characteristically shrill call. In fact, it seemed to him that it was saying his name. "Daviiiiid, Daviiiiid."

He was not surprised. David knew that clairvoyant experiences were common, especially in the mode where one's body was asleep, but where one had not yet begun the astral journey. He thought, *I must've entered the intermediate state without realising it and without having taken off*.

As David had never had the opportunity to communicate with a bird before, he was curious. He had heard voices, and even strange noises during his vision quest, but he had never held a conversation with a non-human spirit.

"Daviiiiid, Daviiiiid," the bird called.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Have you forgotten?"

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<sup>75</sup>The Legend of the Great Race finds its origin in the Sioux people. As it is a part of their oral tradition, the legend varies from community to community.

"Forgotten what?"

"We protected you in exchange for something. We had an agreement, and now you've broken it. "

"What agreement?"

"I see that you've forgotten," the magpie said.

"No, please, remind me. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, it all happened a long, long time ago. Because of your—and humanity's—disregard for the environment, Mother Earth decided to split the continents."

"But this happened way before humans walked the surface of the planet. It was when dinosaurs were in existence!" David exclaimed.

"I see that you've forgotten."

"No, no—please go on."

"Rewriting your history does not make you any less responsible," the bird replied in an offended tone. "As I was saying, Mother Earth split the continents. None of the animals liked this because, soon after, we found we were unable to communicate with many of our equals. We were angry, and so all the four-legged animals met up to have a race with the two-legged animals. It was agreed that whoever won would have power over the others. The aim was to get rid of you guys—the humans. The four-legged creatures selected different animals to represent them, one of which was the buffalo. But you humans, clever as you are, came in search of us magpies, who are just as smart, to remind us that we are two-legged as well. And so, if the four-legged creatures won, it wouldn't only be humans who'd lose, but us birds as well. Is it coming back to you?"

"No. I'm sorry, but I don't remember."

“All right, let me go on and hopefully it’ll come back to you—because we certainly haven’t forgotten. The ploy you humans came up with was that one of us would ride on the buffalo’s back to seem like we were pecking the ticks off his hide while he ran. We agreed, but only under the condition that you humans never again harm Nature or its inhabitants. You guys promised you wouldn’t. Then we went to the buffalo and offered to remove the ticks from his hide—and he agreed. Both the starting and finishing points for the great race were right here, in Inyan Kara. The race began, and without a doubt the buffalo was the fastest. But what this four-legged creature didn’t realise, was that the magpie riding comfortably on his back was a two-legged. So, when he was about to reach the finish line, the magpie flew up and crossed it before everyone else.”

“But that’s cheating!”

“Yes, I know. We all—humans and magpies—took advantage of the other animals’ naivety to fool them. But as we watch you harm Nature and bring suffering upon its inhabitants, we’re sorry that we ever helped you.”

...✚...

“Please consider the fact that I’m here to try to bring peace between the whole of humanity so that it might come together and undo the wrongs it’s done to all species as well as to Mother Earth.”

“Yes, you’re all so brutal that you can’t help but inflict pain, even upon your own species. That’s still more shocking. Apart from you guys, you’ll never find another group of animals who would cause so much pain to their own kind. You all talk about us as being ‘animals’ and ‘beasts’, but it is you who are the true beasts.”

"I know that, and that's why I'm here. I'm trying to find the place I can invite wise people from all nations to come to. We'll discuss peace and harmony so that it will ultimately prevail over the Earth."

"Where is this place?"

"I don't know. Each day I've gone flying like you birds, visiting different realms. Every one of them except the last didn't seem suitable for the kind of meeting I want to hold."

"The place you're looking for is beyond all the realms you've visited," the bird replied. "It's even farther than the Moon."

"How do you know that?"

"It's been barely three days since you took your first flight, but I've been flying for a long, long time. I've been there, and I'll tell you that it's in a place built, not on desire, but on thought."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Did you happen to notice how, in the other realms you visited, the mere act of wanting was enough to make your desire reality?"

"Yes, especially the ones I went to on the third night."

"Exactly. Well, in the place I'm talking about, if you want something to become reality, all you have to do is think about it. So, if your mind isn't quiet, your thoughts will go around and around until you're tangled and confused. You won't be able to form new thoughts, much less focus on them."

"I've been practicing my meditation every morning for thirteen years, trying to learn how to keep a calm mind."

"Well, we'll see if you've been successful. Follow me if you want me to take you there."

David followed the magpie until they had reached a realm completely different from all the others he had been to. At first, he

could not tell how this place was arranged because each thought manifested itself instantaneously. He thought about his childhood dog, and it appeared. He thought about the four days he had spent fasting, and a hearty banquet was laid out in front of him. He thought about Meera's grandmother, and her image appeared right there. However, with a bit of practice he was able to quiet his mind and be in the moment. This allowed him to see how exquisitely beautiful the place was.

A waterfall of the most luminous water emptied into a small river bordered by a forest. This forest was alive with an array of stunning flora. A small hill rose from the centre of the lake, and growing from it was an old ceiba tree. Watching the tree alone aroused in David a feeling of peace and harmony. Its roots snaked over the surface of the hill and into the water. Fruit dangled from its branches, and its leaves swayed in the breeze. The magpie was perched on one of its branches, watching him.

"Where are the others?" David asked.

"You'll have to invite them."

"How?"

"See that rock under your feet? It tells you your direction."

David understood. The rock represented the West, and the tree, the central point. He walked solemnly over to the other side of the hill and visualised a rock on the ground—and it appeared. Then, he closed his eyes and began the invocation:

"Oh Butterfly Clan, element of *air*, wind from the East, please send me one of your children. Send me someone who is blessed with natural wisdom, to represent you at this meeting."

When he opened his eyes, he saw a man standing before him. From his appearance, it was evident that the man hailed from

Northern India. He wore only a cream-coloured dhoti, which was folded vertically in two, gathered between his legs and tied at the back of his waist. There was a hand towel over his arm. A sacred thread hung from his left shoulder across his chest and under his right arm. He clutched a copy of the *Panchang*, the astrological ephemerides of the Vedas. His name was Vivek.

They did not exchange words. Instead, David turned his attention towards the direction representing North. He walked counter clockwise, then visualised another rock on the ground. He closed his eyes and began his second invocation:

“Oh Frog Clan, element of *water*, wind from the North, please send me one of your children. Send me someone who has the power to bring peace, and to represent you at this meeting.”

When he opened his eyes he was met by a slender and exquisitely beautiful young woman. She appeared to have come from the Middle East. Her eyes were jet-black, and she had a pointed nose. Her long, dark, and slightly wavy hair flowed over her shoulders. She wore a turquoise-coloured dress made of a fine material which fell in graceful folds to her feet. This had very broad sleeves which were tied just above her waist with a lapis lazuli-coloured belt. On her shoulders she wore an embroidered shawl dyed with soft colours, which she pulled over her head from time to time. She was barefoot, but wore anklets. There were bracelets on her wrists and a gorgeous necklace around her neck. She was Fatima.

David walked on, in a counter clockwise direction. He crossed over the rock representing his clan—the Thunderbird Clan—until he was standing in the position representing the South. He closed his eyes and began the third invocation:

“Oh Tortoise Clan, *earth* element, wind of the South, please send me one of your children. Send me someone who is capable of

healing this planet, which we are turning into a wasteland with our ignorance, so that she may represent you at this meeting.”

When he opened his eyes, he was met by another woman. This woman was older. She was slightly chubby, dark-skinned, with a snub nose, full lips, and unkempt, curly hair. She had white stripes painted on her face and body, and a scarf on her head. Her belly was bare. There was a twinkle in her eye, and she wore the smile of someone who had learned to live in harmony with the environment and with everyone around her. Her skirt was made of emus’ feathers and she was also barefoot. She was Mama Tuk, a soul who had lived many lives as an Australian aborigine.

David, covered in nothing but a blanket, returned to his rock. Mama Tuk walked towards the ceiba tree. She extended her arms, inviting everyone present to join hands and form a circle around the tree of life. Complete silence, not only of words, but also of thoughts, prevailed as they drank in the splendour of the place. They looked at each other and smiled, for they all knew that the meeting was about to begin. But before we proceed with the dialogue that arose in this special place, I am going to introduce you to the fourth character. She has already been presented as Mama Tuk, and she hails from a place known as, the future.

# Earth



## 4. Children of the Dream<sup>76</sup>



She hails from the Tropic of Capricorn.

She was born on a land  
walked by the mothers of humankind;  
an ancient continent known as Australia.

Hers are the indigenous people—  
guardians of our shared origins,  
and protectors of the primordial lore.



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<sup>76</sup> I thank Ann-Marie Russel, from the *Wirrandjiri* people, for this chapter. Ann-Marie not only inspired the character of Mama Tuk, but she also made it possible for the inspiration to come and the knowledge to flow. This is why it is dedicated to her and to her people.

## 🦘 Hunting Ceremony

MAMA TUK BEAT her breast, mimicking the sound of a female ready to mate to draw the attention of the lone male emu. The sound was like a faraway drum, a resonance that filled the air, signalling the beginning of a hunting ceremony. The majestic bird raised his head, and turned in the woman's direction. The drumming seemed to have achieved its purpose.



John Gould. Birds of Australia. London : J. Gould, 1865, vol. 6 pl. 1. Public Domain.

"Do not look at him," the woman cautioned the girl by her side. "Keep your gaze lowered while you perform the dance of the emu."

Leena carefully followed the instructions of the matriarch. With her right hand, she imitated the bird's movements, bringing the tips of her fingers together to form a beak. Every so often, she raised this pretend head, turning it suddenly from one side to the other, as though the imaginary bird was inspecting the horizon. Then she lowered it, as if to peck at food on the ground. She held her other hand out behind her like a tail. Copying the bird's gait, Leena

hopped up and down and, while walking, raised her knees high so that her toes touched the earth before her heels.

With this act of transfiguration, the bird stopped and remained perfectly still for a moment, trying to guess whether these were two birds of his species, or two humans acting like emus. The matriarch, who also performed the dance, took advantage of his confusion to get closer. When she was a stone's throw away, she raised her eyes from the ground and focused her gaze on the bird's.

The emu was frozen, and the woman used this to draw nearer still, her eyes locked with his. When he was within reach, she made a swift movement with her upraised hand, grabbing him by the neck and covering his eyes. Then, she pressed her thumb and index finger to the arteries that pumped blood to the brain. She started humming a melody that sounded like a lullaby a mother would sing to her baby. As she did, she gently closed his eyelids.

The bird's feet gave way, and he tumbled onto the grass. When Leena heard the thud, she looked up to see Mama Tuk release her pressure on the neck, and raise her hand to the sky.

"Aunty, how did you get the emu to stay so still?" Leena asked.

"With my *miwi* (psychic power)", she replied. "In the next few months I'll teach you how to strengthen yours, so that you can do the same one day."

"And why did you raise your hand just now?" Her eyes drew in everything, like a sponge drawing water.

"So that his *miwi* (soul<sup>77</sup>) would leave his body and be taken up by the Emu Spirit of the Dreamtime."

"The Emu Spirit of the Dreamtime?"

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<sup>77</sup> Notice how the word *miwi* has more than one meaning, depending on the context.

"Yes. Do you remember getting ready for the hunting ceremony yesterday and making the skirt that you're wearing?"

"Yes," the girl replied.

"What did I say to you as you were making it?"

"That I must call the Emu Spirit of the Dreamtime with each feather I sewed into the skirt, so that today, during the dance, it would enter me and I would become the emu itself."

"That's right! If we hadn't carried out all the necessary preparations to call the spirit of his species—offering him due respect—this emu would never have confused us with one of his own. Remember that the costume, the sounds, and the movements of the dance are meant, not only to distract the bird, but also to show him the respect he is due. We aren't imitating an emu—we are actually becoming one for a moment. We are one with our prey in spirit before we are one with it in the flesh. Thus, we have respected the laws of reciprocity to ensure that, when we eat the meat, the flesh nourishes us instead of causing us harm."

"But aunty, isn't hunting only for men?"

"Yes. The law says that hunting is men's business and that women's business is to gather. These laws are not fickle; there is always a very good reason for them. Hunting requires an alert and focused mind. Strength and physical resistance is also necessary. These are masculine qualities. Gathering requires observation and an ability to carry out several tasks at once, which are more feminine qualities. But when instructions come from the Great Mother herself, these are above the law. In my case, I have received orders to ensure that my people never go hungry. I also promised someone that I would teach you to hunt, but I will talk to you about that another time. At any rate, remember that when I hunt there is

a protocol that must be followed; this is why I don't kill just any animal that appears before me.”

Mama Tuk hunted in the same way that she gathered. She did it lovingly, singing as she went, and was often accompanied by a younger member of the community. She did it without weapons or violence. Typically, she would use traps to catch small prey like mammals, birds, or reptiles. These traps varied depending on the animal, and were made of mats weaved from spiny-headed mat-rush<sup>78</sup>, bunches of wattle, and ropes of twisted plant fibres. At other times, she hunted using the hypnotic power of her mind. This was usually when she was seeking prey of a larger size like emus, kangaroos, and wallabies or animals that were more dangerous, such as snakes.

The emu Mama Tuk had killed was old. She knew that he would not have survived the coming winter. His chances of incubating a new brood and not dying in the process were low. Emus have a curious practice. In summer, the female emits drum-like sounds to tell the male that she is ready to mate. She then lays between five and fifteen eggs. At this point she loses interest, and it is up to the male to keep them warm and protect the brood. He incubates the eggs for seven or eight weeks without eating, drinking, or defecating—and without leaving the clutch even once. When the hatchlings are born, he remains by their side for the ensuing six months, when they will then be old enough to fend for themselves.

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<sup>78</sup> *Lomandra longifolia*

## 🦘 Conversations Around the Fire

NOT LONG AFTER the great bird had collapsed, two silhouettes appeared on the horizon. They belonged to the matriarch's nephews, who, following instructions from one of the elders, were headed for the site where the hunting ceremony had taken place.

"*Ummunu* (one who hears the steps of the ants) has just told us that you have caught a *jurrunturu*<sup>79</sup> (old, solitary, male emu) and that we should carry it back to camp," said the older of the two.

"There it is," Mama Tuk replied, pointing to the inert body lying behind a bush.

The matriarch had sent this message just before commencing the dance, using what her people called, the bush telegraph—the telepathic transmission of thoughts.

"How do you learn to use the bush telegraph?" Leena asked when they were back at camp. The sun was slowly setting through the trees, and they sat in a circle around the fire with the rest of the clan. They were roasting the giant bird over the embers, celebrating the arrival of their new visitors. With her gaze fixed to the fire, Muma Tuk answered, "You must have a strong *miwi* and always tell the truth."

"The truth?"

"Have you ever told a lie?" asked the matriarch, true to her usual manner of answering a question with one of her own.

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<sup>79</sup> Most of the Aboriginal words in this story are invented by the author to avoid any association with the 250 Aboriginal languages spoken before European settlement. This story takes place in the future, 700 years after the arrival of the Europeans. Because languages are living creations that evolve, change, and adapt, it cannot be expected that any Aboriginal language existing so far in the future, especially after the experience of colonisation, would remain the same.

Leena hesitated for a moment, then gave a timid nod, lowering her eyes.

"And after you told it, were you afraid someone might find out?"

"Yes," said the girl, her gaze returning to her aunty.

"By doing this, you make it impossible to send your thoughts," the woman said, her voice firm.

"What do you mean, aunty?"

"If you hide the truth from others, you won't be able to transmit telepathically. Think about it. When you tell a lie, you're thinking, I hope no one finds out, aren't you?"

"Yes" she replied.

"Well, when you think in this way, you negate the ability. To develop it, you must always speak the truth and have nothing to hide. When you do this, you will learn how to communicate your thoughts wordlessly; and you will also acquire something even more useful: the ability to materialise your will by simply voicing it."

"Like yesterday, when you asked me to sew the emu feathers into my skirt and said that the next day we would go out to hunt a *jurrunturu*; and then, just after leaving camp, the emu appeared?" asked the girl.

"Exactly!" the woman replied. "My words became reality. The Emu Spirit of the Dreamtime heard us and sent us the emu because the Great Mother knows that I do not tell lies."

The woman pushed a burning branch back into the flames, then sat back on the kangaroo skin. "Telling no lies is necessary so that one might send messages using the bush telegraph; but to receive such messages another quality is needed..."

"—What is that?" interrupted the girl.

"One must speak sparingly and know how to listen in silence. There was once a time when we only uttered the words that we wanted to manifest. If we wanted to communicate with someone, we did it with our thoughts. But now, everything seems to be the opposite to what the Great Mother decreed in the beginning. Now, we communicate with each other by speaking, and we try to manifest reality by thinking—by desiring."

Mama Tuk built up the fire by placing some small branches among the flames. Ummunu had been sitting quietly on the other side of the circle, and he now approached the two women, and said, "Sister, can I contribute my own opinion to your discussion?"

Ummunu didn't often speak; he preferred to listen, but it wasn't to other people's conversations that he listened. Instead, he observed signs from the sky; messages from the animals; fragrances from nature; communications from the ancestors; and lastly, he received messages from other members of the clan using the bush telegraph.

He was an elderly man, aged and shrunken by the course of time. His ears and nose had not shrunk like the rest of him, however, but had continued to grow to a considerable size. His name expressed his abilities, as was the custom of the inhabitants of this ancient, sacred land. People's names changed as new abilities were acquired, which was always the cause for celebration.

In response to Ummunu's request, the matriarch smiled, then asked the girl to fetch the kangaroo skin he had left on the other side of the circle. When the three of them were again seated, the man put aside his faithful walking stick and started to talk:

"This is how we conversed not only between us human beings, but also with the animals, plants, and the spirits that inhabit everything. When we communicated in this way, we were living as

one big family. Gradually, we lost this ability; which meant we had to use language. By expressing our thoughts through words, we forfeited our capacity to communicate with anyone who didn't use the same language as us. And so, we couldn't commune with animals, plants, spirits—even other tribes, since each speaks a different tongue. As you can see, setting up a spoken language actually restricted communication instead of making it easier.”

The conversation drew the attention of two boys who had just arrived. While at first timid—as this was a new experience for them—they showed increasing interest in Ummunu's words. The old man did not need many clues to realise that they wanted to join in. Leena also noticed their curiosity, and moved to one side to make space for them between herself and the matriarch. The boys quickly sat down. Like Leena, they were not Aboriginal; in fact, from his accent, one of them seemed to be from a very distant land. This gathering had been held in honour of these boys and Leena. The three of them were to spend an entire year with the group, learning the ancient customs of these people of the land. They were to discover how to live by hunting and gathering; to live every moment through the manifestations of Mother Nature.

Leena had arrived a few days before. She was from a nearby community—also based in the gum-tree forests of South-eastern Australia—but unlike the Aboriginals, her people lived a sedentary lifestyle. Mama Tuk often visited them to give advice, pass on ancestral knowledge, or simply to spend time with her old friends. Among them were Leena's grandparents, who had been the matriarch's playmates long ago, when she was young and had spent five years learning the customs and knowledge of the people who cultivate the land.

This had been a reciprocal arrangement, so now Leena was receiving her chance to learn the ancient knowledge, just as her

parents had done before her, as well as many others. In line with the exchange, it had been decided that, the day Leena returned to her community, she would be accompanied by Mama Tuk's two nephews. They would learn about the outside world, beyond the vast ocean of trees that covered the land of South-eastern Australia. Because of the proximity of Leena's community, they would do it without having to leave their ancestral land.

But these plans were part of the future, and one of the things that Leena, as well as the boys, had come to learn, was how to live in the here and now.

When they were all seated, the girl asked, "Can we learn this language without words?"

"First it is better to learn the language of our people. This makes it easier to learn the one that is spoken by the spirit," explained Mama Tuk.

"What do you mean?" asked the boy with the accent.

"You have all grown up learning to record your thoughts, but the people of the land do not record—they remember. You believe that you do it so you won't forget, but the truth is that when you write down or store information, you do not need to make the mental effort to memorise it. And so, your minds have become lazy and the knowledge has left you, taking root in all those technological gadgets you carry around. You surround yourselves with these so that you don't have to read Nature or listen to her voice. These artefacts are powered by fire, with what you call, 'electricity'—not with the energy of the spirit. They run on a very dense vibration, which causes headaches in our people."

The boy with the accent tried to conceal a small device hanging from his neck. It was a holographic transmitter, a machine that projected any object into a three dimensional shape, then

answered any question one wanted to ask about it. Mama Tuk gave him an accepting smile, silently communicating to him that he wasn't forbidden to use it, but that he should be aware of the consequences if he did. Then, she continued:

"So, if you wish to learn to speak using your thoughts, you first need to more directly feel the space around you—to perceive it intuitively. You must observe it without using the filter, without applying all those labels that arrange things into categories. These labels are products of the written language. Even though hardly anyone writes nowadays—since most information is recorded by technological artefacts—these labels are still being used. Our language, on the other hand, does not apply them. We depict our surroundings by creating a direct link with the environment, instead of through an idea of what is being described."

"What do you mean by, 'idea'?" Leena asked.

"Your languages are based on abstractions and generalisations. They are useful for communicating ideas—particularly for categorising them—but they are not very practical when it comes to describing Nature, or when interpreting other, less tangible realities, like the Dreamtime," the matriarch replied.

"What do you mean, aunty?"

Once again, the woman responded to Leena's question with one of her own. "What is this?" Mama Tuk asked, pointing to a eucalyptus of the regnant species.

"A tree," she replied.

"You see—you used a label, an idea, to describe something that is real. For your people, the 'plant kingdom' is composed of trees, shrubs, and plants. With these few labels, you describe a richly diverse environment, and in doing this, you deny yourselves the experience of direct perception. If you learn our language, you will

be able to think more like us and perceive things with your senses, instead of with your mind. The mind doesn't feel things—it filters everything recorded by the senses, and distorts, censors, or amplifies them according to its own idea of what is possible or real. Only the senses feel.”

“Does this mean that telepathic communication does not use the mind?” asked the boy with the strange accent.

“Telepathic communication is intuitive and direct because it is spirit-to-spirit communication. It does not pass through the filter of the mind. At the other extreme is writing. Writing does go through the mind because it is the thinking faculty that interprets concepts and translates them into symbols or combinations of letters. Writing uses the mind to put ideas into an order that will convey a message.”

“And where does verbal communication fit?”

“It is halfway between telepathy and writing. In your case, verbal communication is influenced by writing. Your people group objects together so that they might assign words that can be written, pronounced, or translated. You give names to things by pronouncing the combination of letters associated with that thing, but the letters and words are not the thing itself. We, on the other hand, ask the object for its name, and whatever it answers is what we call it. And so, our verbal communication still retains its telepathic essence.”

“This is a eucalyptus regnant, also known as, ‘mountain ash,’” said the boy with the strange accent, proud that he knew the scientific, as well as the lay name of the particular tree. “It is the tallest flowering plant. It can grow up to one hundred metres in height, and can live for six-hundred years.”

“And is it an ash?” asked the woman.

"No, it's a eucalyptus."

"That's exactly what I'm talking about. Because the first colonisers had never seen a eucalyptus before, they called some varieties, 'ash', others, 'box', and some, 'mahogany'. When these lay names were translated into other languages, they were still rendered as 'ash', 'box', and 'mahogany'. You see? You focus more on the meaning of the words than on trying to convey the essence of the object. You're lost in the world of words and symbols."

The three young people began to understand. Instead of naming objects according to what they were, the mind had caused them to name things according to what it wanted them to be.

"Who knows what that one, gazing at us from a distance, is?" Mama Tuk asked, pointing to another eucalyptus growing in a drier, more open area where there were few ferns.

"It's a *silvertop ash*<sup>80</sup>," said Leena, who knew all the different species of gumtrees in the area. "I recognise it because there's no bark on the upper part of the tree, and because of the silvery tones of the trunk."

"You see!" exclaimed the matriarch.

"Whoops," Leena muttered as she realised that, once again, she had described a eucalyptus using the word, 'ash'.

"A step in the right direction would be to call the first one, 'mountain eucalyptus' and the second, 'silvertop eucalyptus', even though both of these names are still linked to an idea, a concept of what you call 'species', and not to the thing we are actually talking about. I'm sure that now I've explained this though, you'll have no problem identifying these others," she said, pointing.

"They are ferns," said the boy who had not spoken until now.

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<sup>80</sup> *Eucalytus sieberi*.

"Okay, so you've labelled them, but did you listen first to what they had to say?" Mama Tuk asked. Ummunu looked at her with a conspiring smile.

"But they're trees!" replied the boy with the strange accent, confused.

"As long as you see them only as trees, you will never be able to hear what they have to say to you. Tonight, while your bodies sleep, I will take you all to meet them and listen to their story. After hearing them, I'm sure you will never think of them as simple plants ever again."

Leena was intrigued. Ummunu and the boys got up then and returned to their places. Later, kangaroo skins were laid down in the small clearing between the mountain eucalyptus and the ferns, and with the sky as their ceiling, the group stretched out for the night. In the glow of the embers and the dancing shadows awakened by the flames, Leena began to recall the day of her arrival, scarcely a week before.

### **The Day of the Arrival**

MAMA TUK WAS like a sister to Lena's grandmother. This was why, on the day that Leena arrived, the matriarch asked her two nephews to take the girl for a walk so that she could become familiar with the land. From camp, they wandered to a small hill near the river which provided a good view of the whole area.

The older boy pointed, and in broken English, he said, "You see there, near that rock wall where *Ubunu* is flowing—those two large blocks of stone? They are called, *Wurrundi* and *Watave*; they are two kangaroos that died in a fight to become the lead male. *Ubunu* is the river, still blackish-red from the blood spilt during that fight.

We don't drink Ubunu's water, but we do collect foam from its whirlpools, because aunty knows how to use it to make ointments."

The three kept walking until they reached a place with a better view of the rock wall. Then, the boy said, "You see the rocks up there, where Ubunu comes out? In that place live the *Gungurru*, a tea tree shrub where the foam comes from. They make the water blackish-red. For us, the colour of the water is a way of remembering what happened to Wurrundi and Watave."

"I don't fight anymore!" the other boy said, puffing out his chest. "I play, like the joeys (young kangaroos)—but without hurting myself."

The older boy nodded and continued with his description of the place. "You see that hole, where the water falls and then disappears? That is where the women bathe. I am not allowed to go there anymore because I am a grown up boy now." He said this with his chin raised, which gave him a majestic air.

"During the Dreamtime *Kakuna*, the wombat, lived in there and made his burrow near the mouth of the river. He wanted to take all of the water, but instead he drowned."

"Kakuna was so silly to try and take all the water from the river!" said the younger boy.

"It comes out on the other side of the rocks," he went on. "That is where we men bathe, so you are not allowed to go there." He paused, as though making sure that Leena had understood his instruction. "Now that I have told you all of this, please tell us what you can see in the place that you come from."

"Well, I don't live very far from here. Sometimes I visit a place where there are buildings like termite nests—as tall as, or even taller than, this hill. We call them, 'cities'."

"Who built them?" asked the younger boy.

"People like us," answered the girl.

"People like us?" he said. "Do they live in the Dreamtime there? Are they giant termites—is that why they need to live in such big mountains?"

At the time, Leena didn't understand the reason for this question; but as time went by, she came to learn three basic facts.

The first was that the events of the Dreamtime—however extraordinary or unlikely they seemed to her—were not understood by the natives as a product of their imagination, not even by the adults. In fact, the word, 'imagination' did not even have an equivalent in the various Aboriginal languages. This became clear to her one day when she asked Mama Tuk about it. The woman had replied:

"If you people understood your laws as the product of a few legislators' imaginations, do you think you would respect them in the same way? For your people, 'to imagine' is to visualise something that is not real; while for us, everything is real; so that word does not exist in our vocabulary."

The second fact that Leena came to understand was that all the Dreamtime stories had a teaching purpose, which was evident on two levels: the moral and the practical. For example, the fight between the two kangaroos and the blood spilt was told to highlight the possible consequences of a dispute (moral), as well as to remind people that the water was not suitable to drink (practical). The hole where the river disappeared reminded people that trying to accumulate things instead of sharing them went against the laws of nature (moral), and also warned the children against swimming there, as the currents could suck them into the tunnel (practical). As these stories were written into nature itself,

they acted as ever-present testimonials to what the people called 'law' and 'lore', that is, to the principles that governed their lives.

Lastly, Leena saw how the law—and the lore—reinforced the message that humans were there to contemplate Creation and to learn from her. Humanity's role was to keep singing down the land; to preserve it by chanting it with the tune shared by the ancestors.

"The desire to change our surroundings broke the balance," aunty had said to her once. "Everything began with people's attempt to possess the land; but can one possess a mother? Imagine if your cells decided to take over your body so that they might divide the various organs among them—the liver for the red cells; the kidneys for the white cells; the brain for the neurones. In fact, isn't it true that when the cells stop doing what they should, you call them, 'cancerous'? This is why your respective communities have sent you here— so we can communicate to you the original teachings, so that what happened five hundred years ago won't happen again. Remember, my daughter, nature isn't based on servitude—where some are subservient and others are in charge. Instead, it is based on reciprocity. It's not the fittest who survive, but those who are the most giving."

After Leena had described in detail to the two boys what a city was like, the three continued walking. The oldest boy lead the group, scanning the ground to make sure that there were no snakes hidden in the vegetation and attentive to the slightest movement. He was so engrossed that it was as though the space around him had become an extension of himself. They stopped then under a wattle tree.

"Do you hear the sound of the wind brushing *Munimuni's* leaves?"

Leena guessed that Munimuni was the name of this particular wattle tree, which led her to suppose that these people named, not

only mythological beings from the Dreamtime like the two kangaroos and the wombat, but also the vegetation from everyday reality.

"Listen to the song of those two kookaburras trying to agree on the exact boundaries of their territories. Now that their laughter is dying, listen carefully to that other sound. It's almost the same as the kookaburras' laughter, but it is coming from somewhere else. It's a lyrebird copying them. You can hear these birds more often in winter, but they can also be heard on a summer's day like today. Lyrebirds can imitate two tunes at the same time, to make it sound like two kookaburras laughing. Come. Follow me."

The three walked towards the river once more. Suddenly, the cicadas began chirping all around them. Recently, they had started singing in the South again, as though the cold of the past few centuries had begun to abate, and with the new summer they had returned. The strident sound of the males vibrated the air, deafening the three young ones. The boy gestured for them to stop. Soon, the cicadas closer to the water ceased their song, while those in the background went on.

"What happened?" Leena asked.

"It was that fish over there," said the younger boy. "You startled him."

Leena looked at the little pond formed by the river, but could not see anything. Her question drowned out the sound of the fish ducking under the water, and the tiny ripples caused by its swift movement were only glimpsed by the two boys.

"This type of fish<sup>81</sup> loves cicadas; that's why they've stopped chirping," said the younger boy.

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<sup>81</sup> *Macquaria novemaculeata* - Australian Bass

"Now that you have heard our sounds, please tell us if they are the same in the place where you come from."

The boys knew that in one year they would go and spend some time in Leena's community. They wanted to make sure that the place would be familiar to them.

"The sounds coming from nature are the same because I live only one day's walk from here. But it is also quite common to hear anti-gravity vehicles whizzing through space, domestic animals, and sometimes beeps from our technological devices."

The boys watched her as though trying to catch every detail, as though everything she said was very important. Then, the older boy asked, "Can you smell..." and he started describing in detail the different fragrances present within that pocket of the Australian bush—the scent of the tea tree; the wattle tree flowers; the moss; but he described in most detail the smell of the gumtrees. "Can you smell its fragrance?" he asked again as he picked the leaf of a young eucalyptus and rubbed it between his hands. "It is much stronger after the rain, especially after a summer storm. When the leaf and bark litter get wet, the smell that floats up lifts your spirits."

"And what about the amazing colours after a downpour!" cried the youngest one, who was visibly moved. "When the birds all sing at once to celebrate the rain and the Sun coming out. Are the scents and sounds the same where you live? Do the birds sing the same songs?"

Meera understood at last. The boys were not interested in finding out abstract information, like her community's political system, or the technological gadgets they had, or whether they still used money, or reciprocity and barter instead. They could not conceive of a way of life that was not entwined with nature; a way of living that meant hearing her music and singing it at the same time. They belonged to this land; they were this land, as well as its

guardians. Leaving it behind, and severing themselves from the vibration that had nursed them from the moment they were born, was unthinkable. Doing this would make them sick, first in spirit—which then could only manifest in their bodies. This was why they wanted to make sure that, while in Leena's community, they were not going to be separated from what was so familiar to them.

## 🕯 The Dream

THE PLACE WAS crowded with people. They seemed to be celebrating something, as there was a feeling of joy in the ambience. Some were dancing, some singing, and others threw things into the air, shouting, 'Hurrah!' Leena watched them. *What is happening?* she thought. There were vehicles parked around, all hovering in stand-by, though no one was in them, and many of the doors stood open. Those who had arrived on horseback hadn't tethered the animals; they'd instead just left them to graze. Leena recognised the location. It was her community's meeting place, where the elders' council was situated.

The agora stood at the centre, a glass and adobe building, where the community members met to discuss things. There they would debate any matter that affected the community until they reached a consensus. Sometimes the meetings would last for hours, sometimes days. The positive side of this was that nobody left the council feeling unheard, and once a decision was made, it was carried out quickly and efficiently, because everyone was in agreement.

When there were no meetings, the building was used as a learning centre and an access point for the global registers. These held all types of information, which they stored holographically, and they were able to generate multi-sensorial data. There were

recordings of talks given by the wise ones; information on the behaviour and habitats of most animal species; and the stored smells and tastes of innumerable medicinal plants. The global registers also granted access to old written and audiovisual documents, where the information from the previous era and from the period of transition was stored.

Leena had spent hours there, both by herself and with her companions, listening to the adults debating or looking at the records, and with her companions, researching topics of interest. These were interactive methods of learning, which did not follow a pre-established study plan. The marking system was not based on the student's ability to absorb information and regurgitate it on the day of the exam, but on their ability to develop critical awareness. The purpose was not to 'train', but to 'educate', in the literal sense of the word.<sup>82</sup>

Suddenly, the matriarch appeared. Her figure stood out because she was the only person walking towards Leena among all those absorbed in the celebration. As she approached, her lips moved as though she was trying to tell Leena something, but with all the hubbub, the girl could not hear.

"Leena, you are dreaming," Mama Tuk said into her ear.

"What do you mean, aunty?"

"This is a dream. If you come with me, I will tell you how to use this dream to travel to other places, where you can learn much more."

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<sup>82</sup> The word 'train' means to cause something or someone to grow and develop in a particular way, or according to a required shape. Thus, the trainer takes an active role while the trainee remains passive. The word, 'educate', however, comes from the Latin, *educere*, which means "to bring out that which is within". It refers to the act of awakening the inner potential of the student. In such circumstances the student takes a more active role, deciding for themselves what to learn and how to learn it.

Together they climbed a small nearby hill. The matriarch took the girl by the hand and led her to the edge of the rock face. Strangely, a few seconds later, Leena realised that they were not on the hilltop as she had thought, but instead at the foot of a cliff that had been sculpted by a surging river. The chasm lay open before her, like a cut that exposed raw flesh. Trees covered the landscape below them in a carpet. Leena recognised the place.

*Perhaps it's true that I'm dreaming because these things don't happen in real life,* she thought.

"Yes, you are dreaming," Mama Tuk said, having read her thoughts. "Jump with me and we will fly away from this place."

They held hands and jumped. As they floated in mid-air, Leena felt an incredible sensation of lightness, as though she had been raised by a gentle breeze. Everything seemed to have lost its solidity. When she looked at the mountain range on the horizon, its shape and colour began to change. Clouds appeared around them; or rather, they were surrounded by a sort of mist. When it cleared, Leena found herself back at the camp. The coals in the fire where they had cooked the emu were still smoking and the two boys waited for them. They also appeared to have been dragged from their sleep by Mama Tuk.

"Come with me; I would like to introduce you to someone," said the matriarch.

"Who?" Leena asked.

"To the beings you say belong to the 'plant kingdom' because they do not move or make sounds. This is how you distinguish them from the 'animals'. Remember?"

"Aristotle made this distinction a long time ago," said the boy with the accent.

"The concept of 'a long time ago' doesn't make much sense here. The course of time, as you experience it in waking reality, is different to how it is on this plane. You are in one of the realities of the Dreamtime and you are visiting it in spirit," the woman reminded them.

### ✦ Legend of the Origin of Human Beings ✦

Mama Tuk turned to the cluster of ferns growing by the camp and started to invoke their spirits. The three youths watched in amazement as shapes slowly appeared in the plants. These settled into forms that looked somewhat like human beings, but which retained fern-like qualities. Their hands were slender with long fingers similar in shape to the spirals of rolled up fern leaves. They coiled and uncoiled when they spoke. The dried fallen leaves formed chestnut-coloured skirts. These beings didn't speak aloud; instead they conveyed information by sending images that the group received intuitively.

"We have been living on this land almost since the beginning," said the first fern. "We are among the first inhabitants. In the beginning, the land was barren. The soil was sterile. This was a desolated, rocky terrain eroded by the rain. Great expanses of gravel and sand extended to the horizon. Lava encrusted the mountainside from constantly-erupting volcanoes. Empty salt lakes remained where once had swept a vast and wild ocean. The ground was painted the tones of clay in hues of red, grey and yellow. The only green to be found came from the algae that shyly crept over the ocean shore. If you would like to know more about this period, ask the rocks. They can tell you everything, because they were around long before us. In fact, they have been here since the very beginning."

The first fern paused and her companion continued the story. "Then, the mosses appeared on the scene, as well as other types of

plants that no longer exist. Not long after this, we appeared.<sup>83</sup> Together we all colonised the land and made it green. With our cover, the clouds came to visit more often, and they brought rain. This is how, bit by bit, we transformed the barren land into a pristine rainforest.”

This fern grew quiet, and now a third stepped in to take up the story. “But then, an ice age began and the cold grew more and more intense.<sup>84</sup> Half of the continent was covered with ice, including the land you are standing on now. When the glaciers eventually retreated, everything had again become barren, as it was in the beginning. The land was covered in rocks, gravel, and sediments once more. Nevertheless, we came back, and, after a time, we returned the land to rainforest. For a long period everything was green, lush and wet, until the fires began. This encouraged the growth of the eucalyptus.”<sup>85</sup>

The fern pointed to the silvertop ash trees that had taken root in the strip where the ferny rainforest gave way to a much drier landscape made up of gumtrees, wattle trees, and tea-trees. “Now, they take up almost the entire land, leaving only a few pockets

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<sup>83</sup> It is believed that ferns appeared in the Early Carboniferous period which took place 359-299 million years ago.

<sup>84</sup> In the first 74 million years of the Carboniferous period, the part of Gondwana that is now Australia moved from the equator to latitudes closer to the South Pole. As a result, ice covered a large part. Source: White, Mary E. *Running Down, Water in a Changing Land*. NSW: Kangaroo Press, 2000.

<sup>85</sup> There was a period of volcanic eruptions 25-40 million years ago. The following document: Cary, G., David Lindenmayer, and Stephen Mayers. *Australia Burning*. CSIRO Publishing, 2003. links the expansion of the eucalypts from the north of modern Australia to the recurring fires caused by lightning in what they call, “the tertiary period”. These fires created the conditions for a fire-adapted species, such as the eucalypts, to take over the Gondwanian rain-forests.

where we are able to live.<sup>86</sup> But look—wherever they grow, there is practically no water. They suck it away because their thirst is so great. There isn't much vegetation around them either because they turn the ground infertile with their acidic leaves and bark. Nothing germinates at their feet. This is their tactic: to fill the undergrowth with their litter until the fires come. Then, the ground cover burns, and this germinates their seeds, and kills us. With this strategy, they have taken over the entire land. If we leave our pockets to live in the acidic environment they have created, their ally, the fire, wounds or kills us."

Once the ferns had spoken their part, or rather, projected their thoughts, Mama Tuk and the three adolescents approached one of the silvertop ash trees to see what he had to say.

The spirit of this eucalyptus was completely different. While the ferns had seemed like elderly ladies, with their long fingers and ragged skirts, the ash was more like a young man, energetic, impatient—and even a bit short-tempered. His nose was small, his eyes intense, his features sharp. He had reddish skin, a slender body, and long arms and legs that seemed to move through this dreamy space with the greatest of ease. In fact, he rarely rested on his trunk as he was constantly in motion. He was a bundle of nerves and fibre.

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<sup>86</sup> In modern times, only 0.3 percent of Australia is covered by ancient Gondwanian rainforest. Source: *Report on the State of Conservation of Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia*. UNESCO, 2002.

"Don't believe those ferns!" he said. "They are always complaining! We came from the rainforest too.<sup>87</sup> We saw how fire razed it back to a land belonging to no one (*terra nullius*). This is how we took over the space that the fires created. Those same clouds that, in the past, bore water, also brought the lightning that caused these wildfires. The ferns had their time; but now it is over and our turn has arrived."

Leena turned to the matriarch and said, "Aunty, they present two very different sides. Will they ever agree?"

"There can always be agreement," the woman replied. "The most important thing is that it promotes spiritual growth, and that when we grow spiritually, we become something new, something greater than ever before. Come, and I will show you the eucalyptus that went back to the rainforest to learn how to live with the ferns."

Mama Tuk led the three teenagers back to the camp. This time, however, they did not visit the ferns; they went towards the majestic mountain ash whose foliage covered the entire clearing where the group was camped. This specimen was more than eighty metres in height and around five hundred years old. Just as the boy with the strange accent had explained, it was the tallest flowering tree.

"This is a eucalyptus that has fulfilled its potential by deciding to go back to the small pocket of rainforest that it originally came from," she explained. "It exemplifies how the fusion between past and present makes way for a new future. Like the other eucalypts, the mountain ash needs fire to germinate its seed; it also needs the

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<sup>87</sup> The eucalyptus belongs to the *Myrtaceae* family, which abound in tropical and sub-tropical climates, often in rainforest environments. According to Michael Crisp's et al, "Flammable biomes dominated by eucalypts originated at the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary" *Nature Communications*, 2011, the eucalypts began to vary and become resilient to fire at the beginning of the Paleogene period, 60-62 million years ago.

open space that fire helps to create. But once it has grown, like the ferns, a blaze can kill it easily. This is how it is different from its relative, the silvertop, which is perhaps the fastest to recover after a fire."

This mountain ash was majestic and kindly as well. Even ten people holding hands could not have reached around its girth. It was like an enormous water tank which generously sustained all vegetation, and many other species around it, by making sure that they never lacked water.<sup>88</sup> For example, the moss, which had been the first coloniser of this land, grew at its base, dressing its feet in velvety green. The tree also provided a habitat for the Australian eagle, the lyrebird, and the leadbeater possum, among others.

The eyes of the tree's spirit were hidden behind bushy brows. He had the look of someone who was comfortable with silence, but who also had many stories to tell. His nose was voluminous, wrinkled and flat; his mouth was wide and fleshy. The ears were well-developed and seemed attuned to the sounds and tones of nature. His size was considerable, as large as the tree he dwelled within. Even so, he was not intimidating; in fact, he transmitted a feeling of shelter and protection.

When Leena and the boys saw him, they immediately understood why the camp was located beneath his foliage. Every nook and cranny of the forest had its own vibration, transmitted by the look of the place and the vegetation that grew there. Each tree had its own presence, which bestowed certain benefits—some were good for conception; others for birth; and still others for discovering oneself. The mountain ash created the right

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<sup>88</sup> In high rainfall areas, a 250-year-old mountain ash forest produces 420 mm more rainfall compared to a forest of the same species which is only 15 years old. Source: Mariño, Miguel, and Slobodan Simonovic. "Integrated Water Resources Management". *IAHS Publication* (2001): no 272, (2001):252

atmosphere for camping because it made sure that anyone sleeping beneath its canopy had good journeys to the Dreamtime.

Without taking his gaze from the visitors, the mountain ash said, "Once the eucalypts had spread all over the land, the fire they depended on endangered what little pockets remained of the ancient Gondwanian rainforest. It was important to act and to do so quickly, because these pockets contained half of what you people call, 'the plant families', and one third of 'the mammal and bird species.'<sup>89</sup> Eventually, it was decided that rather than keep the eucalypts at a distance, they would instead invite them to grow inside rainforest pockets like this one. These eucalypts were the first ancestors of my species. Thanks to the abundant water and rich food provided in these parts, we grew to the great heights for which we are known today."

He paused to welcome a nesting owl back into his branches then went on. "Nevertheless, to protect or even expand these small pockets of rainforest, we needed more help. We needed beings who could tame fire. And so, it was agreed that each plant and animal species would contribute a sufficient number of souls to bring to life a new kind—one that would be the tamers of fire and the caretakers of nature. This is how the first humans were born. They were given the skills and intelligence to master fire and preserve the land. They were to be the guardians and protectors of the Gondwanian forest."

"We call the plant and animal species that handed over their souls, 'totemic ancestors,'" Mama Tuk added. "This is why we define our ancestry according to where the spirit comes from. This is also why we say we have been on this land since the beginning. Even if

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<sup>89</sup> UNESCO. "Report on the State of Conservation of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia." *Australian National Periodic Report. Section II*. UNESCO, 2002. <<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/periodicreporting/apa/cycle01/section2/368.pdf>>

we have not inhabited it in human form, our spirits—first in plant or even rock-form, and later on as animals—have been living here right from the time of Creation, right from the moment the creative ancestors projected their dream and populated the Earth. And between one life and the next, we wait as spirits in the billabongs<sup>90</sup>, or waterholes—or in those heavenly realms that the Great Mother keeps for us.”

“The humans became the guardians and protectors of this fragile land,” the mountain ash went on. “Then, as tends to happen in nature, the needs of some became the benefit of others. Humans required grass in abundance for the ever-increasing kangaroo and wallaby populations they needed to hunt. This meant that they had to thin out the gumtrees to let in the sunlight, raise the water table, and make way for pasture. They also needed regular, controlled burnings of the undergrowth so that the leaf litter would not accumulate.”



“Because the trees were more spread out after this, there was less competition between them for light and water,” Mama Tuk said, taking up the tale once more. “And so, they grew bigger and taller, which meant that they could retain more water during heavy rains. Then, on dry days, they would return the moisture to the soil. In this way, the flow of rivers and streams was kept more constant. The fire never burnt the treetops because the forest was wetter, the distance between the trees was greater; and because various generations grew together, each at a different height. This is why it never had a chance to run wild and cause great destruction.”

“How did this practice affect the small remnants of Gondwanian rainforest that still remained?” Leena asked.

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<sup>90</sup> Australian word for the water that remains in the old riverbed when the river changes its course

"The aim was to reverse the disappearance of the rainforest so that the edges could expand," the majestic tree went on. "To do this, the mountain ash trees and the humans began to work as a team. First, they spread our seeds around the outer edges of the rainforest, to be germinated by their controlled fires. Once this was done, a new generation of mountain ashes would grow, and when they had reached a height where they could become water-givers, the rainforest would then extend beneath them."

"I'm glad to hear that," Leena said.

"Yes. But then a type of spirit who had left this land long ago and hadn't walked it since, came back," the matriarch said. "Because of the long absence, their skin had turned pale, so at first we thought them disembodied spirits—what you would call, 'ghosts' or 'phantoms'. But then, we realised that they did indeed have a body; and that they could affect the environment and transform it. We also noticed that something had happened to them in their time away because their hearts had become dry."

"Dry hearts?" asked the girl.

"Yes," answered the mountain ash. "Their nature was insatiable—like that of the gumtrees—and, like us, they came back from the north. They wanted us for wood and started cutting us down. They logged and logged without stopping, taking both the oldest—those that retained the water—as well as the young ones. They cut down both the rainforest, and the bush<sup>91</sup> of the drier regions. After this, they burnt anything they couldn't take so that the seeds would germinate and a new generation could grow. They called it 'clearfell logging'. But because they had razed everything, the new trees sprouted all at once. And so, hundreds of gumtrees grew close together—all of them at the same height."

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<sup>91</sup> Australian word for forest.

"This made the forest drier," Mama Tuk said. "It takes one hundred and fifty to two hundred years for cleared land to return to its former levels of humidity."<sup>92</sup> But each portion that had been set aside for logging was routinely cut down and burnt every fifty to eighty years."<sup>93</sup>

"How did this affect the fires?" asked the boy with the strange accent.

"Well, the forests were drier, with smaller trees growing closer together. As they had all sprouted at once, the treetops were at the same height. So, when the fires came, instead of burning only the undergrowth, as they had in former times, they raced along the tops, consuming the entire tree. They became wild, and very dangerous. Nothing stood in their way."<sup>94</sup> It was these bushfires

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<sup>92</sup> The Kuczera Curve shows a drop in the production of water immediately after logging. The absolute minimum is reached 20-30 years after logging, and then gradually increases. To recoup the levels of production in place before logging takes 150-200 years. Source: Murray Peel and others. *Predicting the Water Yield Impacts of Forest Disturbance in the Maroondah and Thompson Catchments Using the Macaque Model*. Cooperative Research Centre for Catchment Hydrology, 2000,

<sup>93</sup> Traill, Barry, "Woodchips or Wildlife: The Case Against Logging Our Native Forests" *The Environment Papers*, Victorian National Parks Association, Volume 1, Issue No. 1, (1995):11

<sup>94</sup> The report, by Geoffrey Cary and others. *Australia Burning*. CSIRO Publishing 2003, states that there were three periods of forest fires in Australia:

1. The pre-human period, which began 25-40 million years ago, when lightning caused massive forest fires which enabled fire-adapted species to take over the Gondwanian rainforest;
2. The Aboriginal period, when the fires were brought under control;
3. The period since European colonisation, when the fires became uncontrollable.

that burnt what tiny remnants of Gondwanian forest still remained,<sup>95</sup> and they even devoured whole towns.”<sup>96</sup>

Leena and the boys looked around to see the dreamy landscape transform into a scene of destruction. This was how the place would look after the ravages of logging. The mountain ash had been reduced to a stump. Other trees around them had also been cut down, their bark ripped off by the claws of machines; and branches, which might have borne the seeds of a new generation, were gone. Ferns had been crushed by the iron caterpillars; everything had been burnt, and now, all that was left was charred wood, ash, and those few damp logs that had been left to rot.

Everyone remained silent, digesting the scene. There was nothing to be said. The boy with the strange accent started to inspect the area. Then, he jumped up onto the base of the old mountain eucalyptus, measured its diameter with five steps, and said, "Why did they do this?"

"They took most of the wood to make paper,"<sup>97</sup> Mama Tuk replied. "But the problem wasn't the paper itself, because this could be made without cutting down old-growth forests here on the planet's driest continent. The problem was in their way of thinking, in their destructive logic."

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<sup>95</sup> In Tasmania, 85 per cent of mountain ash trees (*Eucalyptus Regnans*) have been cut down, most of them to make paper. Source: Flanagan, Richard. "Out of Control : the Tragedy of Tasmania's Forests". *The Monthly* (2007): 23: 20-31

<sup>96</sup> On February 7th, 2009, a series of uncontrolled fires killed 173 people and injured 414 others in what was called, "Black Saturday". These bushfires affected 78 towns and an estimated 7,562 people were displaced. A large part of the area burnt had been logged just prior, or was plantation forest. The disaster was predicted in 2002, when large tracts of rainforest were cut down in the Cathedral Ranges, close to Marysville.

<sup>97</sup> According to the VicForest annual report, in the 2009-2010 fiscal year, 68 per cent of wood taken from logged trees was used to make paper. It was sold at approximately \$2.50 a tonne.

## 🦋 The New Humans

THIS DESOLATE IMAGE remained in the minds of the three youths when they awoke moments later. After they had opened their eyes, they looked for each other, then sought out the matriarch herself. Mama Tuk was not there. They realised that she must have spent the night somewhere else in the bush—if she had slept at all. She did not need to dream to experience the regions of the spirit, as she could do it at will.<sup>98</sup>

The boy with the strange accent was, once again, the first to speak. "I can't understand it. They logged the forest, and especially the small pockets of Gondwanian rainforest, to make paper? Even though these pockets covered only a fraction of the land, they provided a habitat for half the plant species and a third of mammal and bird species. I can't comprehend it. Was this thing they called, 'paper' so valuable?"

Leena was fully aware of what had been done to this forest five hundred years ago. Having lived in this land all her life, she had been told the story time and time again by the adults. To exploit the forest like this now would be unimaginable—unconceivable. In Leena's time, one thing was paramount—to humanity as a whole, to each community, each home, and every individual—and this was to contribute to the environment in a positive way. At the end of each day, it was common to meet in groups and ask each other: "What have we done today for the Mother?"

For the past five centuries humanity had focused all of its energy on bringing balance back on Earth so that it could live in harmony with its surroundings once more. Everyone fulfilled this task in their own way, each person according to their own abilities.

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<sup>98</sup> Being able to move between realms without confusing them is the natural ability of the shaman. Normal human beings experience astral travel when they sleep and, with a bit of luck, they wake up and remember the places they have visited.

For example, Mama Tuk's group was in charge of protecting and expanding the Gondwanian remnants, and increasing their genetic diversity. They carried out this task with the sensitivity they were known for without disturbing Nature or upsetting its harmony. They always knew whether an approach was right, or whether it would bring some harmful consequence in the future. They knew this because they were in tune with the Mother.

This was why they were here, camping for a few days underneath the majestic mountain ash. They were collecting some of its seeds. Soon, they would go west, to spread them on the outer edges of another rainforest pocket; then they would burn the area very carefully so that the seeds could germinate. Two hundred years in the future, this area would also become Gondwanian rainforest. By then, it would be the great-great grandchildren of these people who would be planting more seeds in other newly-defined outer boundaries.

In Leena's community, they did exactly the same thing, but in a more sedentary way. The occupants of each household were responsible for turning the surrounding land into a green belt. On these areas they grew a third of their food, collected their household water, generated their energy, and deposited all of their domestic waste, after properly recycling it. Another third of their food came from communal land which was farmed by a village or hamlet. The final third came from elsewhere, and was usually obtained through barter. Barter was not the practice when the exchange took place among members of the same community; however. Instead it was done through reciprocity, by the practice of, today for you and tomorrow for me.

The villages were grouped together in networks which resembled the warp threads in a cloth. Those village groups, separated by distance maintained 'virtual groupings'—connections

through telematic communication, which were like the weft threads in a cloth. Together, these made up the fabric of the extended village. This practice was called, 'enveloping the land' by 'weaving hamlets' into it. Each individual, household, and group was valued for their contributions, whether they be in the arts, research, manufacturing, preservation, transformation, or restoration. This was called, 'social benefit' and was considered even more valuable when it was done, or given, without expecting anything in return. When something was received, it was shared among the community. This was how Nature operated and humans followed her example.

When Mama Tuk arrived back at camp, the youths were still feeling the impact of the logging scene. None of them had been able fully to digest the experience, so their emotions were still strong—so strong that they permeated the air. The matriarch could feel the dense energy; she could see shades of grey that had been evoked by their depression and pessimism; the scarlet aroused by their indignation.<sup>99</sup> Most of this subtle matter was stuck around their navels. The woman realised that their *miwi* needed help to make sense of the experience, so she asked, "Do you understand now why my people in the past drank so much *grog* (alcohol)?"

All three of them burst into tears. Mama Tuk drew them into her arms. She gently stroked their backs in a downward motion. Their tears, and Mama Tuk's back rub, were cathartic; they helped to bring the emotional energy condensed around their navels down to their hips, legs, and finally out through the soles of their bare feet. Here it left their bodies to be absorbed by the Earth, by the Mother who took everything.

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<sup>99</sup> Emotion linked to each colour. Source: Swami Panchadasi. *The Human Aura Astral Colours and Thought Forms*. Des Plaines, Ill: Yoga Publication Society. 1912

"You drank because you are the land, and whatever she suffers, you experience it too," said the quiet boy, his eyes glistening with tears. "Just as they were polluting the Earth, you polluted your bodies. Just as they were abusing the Earth, you abused yourselves."

"Where are you from?" Leena asked him.

"*Ceja de Selva*," the boy answered.

Five centuries before, this question would have been answered with the name of a country. He would have said, "Peru". But now, instead of replying with the name of a Nation State, people answered with a name that described their local geographical features. *Ceja de Selva* was, the side of the Andes facing the Amazon rainforest. This boy had come from an environment that, five centuries before, had experienced similar abuse.

Mama Tuk had not needed to ask this boy where he came from. She had already seen it in the energy that surrounded him because its vibrations permeated his spirit. She could see that, like her, he hailed from the rainforest. His home environment; however, had much more of a variance in altitude. It was among the mountains and close to the Equator. There, the temperature decreased as the altitude became greater, rather than fluctuating with the cycle of the seasons. There, the climate also varied with the temperature. This made it possible to grow different varieties of crops in each of these thermal terraces, according to their altitude. With her abilities, Mama Tuk could read all of these subtleties in the boy's aura.

She could also glean information about someone by observing and speaking to their guides. These guides were not people in the physical sense, but were beings such as angels, nature spirits, disembodied ancestors, or totemic animals, who assisted the living from the spirit world. Each type of being resided in its own

vibratory frequency. In order to visualise a particular spirit, Mama Tuk just synchronised her gaze with its frequency.

She knew that Leena's spirit had once been an uncle of hers who she had never had the chance to meet. The spirit of Mama Tuk's father, who had died some time before, had told her this. The Aboriginal people avoided saying the names of their dead aloud for fear of calling them back. They wished for their loved ones to rest in the spirit worlds, rather than returning each time their name was uttered, but there were times when some spirits came back without being called. Sometimes they returned because of an attachment; at others, so that they might deal with something they had left unfinished in life.

In the case of Mama Tuk's father, he had felt responsible for his younger brother's premature death from snake bite. Most would say that no one could be blamed in this instance; however, according to the original inhabitants of this land, everything happened for a reason. Each misfortune, though it may appear random, was the result of an imbalance and harked back to the original event that caused it. This was so that those involved might know what needed to be corrected to prevent it from happening again.

The day that this misfortune took place, her father and his younger brother—who was now Leena—were hunting a red-bellied black snake. They weren't pursuing it for food, but for sport, and because they didn't want it slithering around their camp. They killed the creature, and in doing so, dishonoured the Snake Spirit of the Dreamtime. What was worse, the snake was the totem animal of the boy. As he was spiritually connected to this creature, he was obliged to protect it. The boy had been too young to know this, but his older brother hadn't been. This made him responsible.

Too many laws had been broken, and so the Snake Spirit of the Dreamtime sent one of its own to remind the boys that they couldn't kill without a reason. The next day a brown snake bit the younger boy. Snakes were very territorial and the red-bellied black snakes, not prone to attacking and not deadly, kept the brown snakes away. The brown snakes, on the other hand, were classed as the second deadliest snake in the world and were much more likely to bite.

Leena screamed.

"What's wrong?" the others called, startled.

"I can see a snake and I'm terrified of them!" she cried.

Mama Tuk approached the reptile and asked it to stop in its tracks. She grabbed Leena's hand and drew her closer to it. Then, she introduced them, so that they would recognise each other as equals.

"If you don't hurt them, nothing bad will happen to you—so don't worry. What you did when you were in another body has already been addressed. Remember, the snake is still your totem animal. You will not be able to rediscover yourself until you accept it."

The matriarch knew that it would take time to heal the trauma of having died from a snake bite, but she also knew that once she had taught Leena the old customs, her father would not need to come back, and could rest in peace. She was doing what was expected of an older brother. That was why she had taken Leena to hunt the emu, something that was usually only done by men. The whole time they had hunted the bird, the matriarch had felt her father's presence, and the vibration of gratitude he had emanated to see his dead brother's soul learning the old customs.

After Leena had recovered from her encounter with the snake, the matriarch gestured for the two boys to come closer. When the four were seated in a circle with the sounds of the community in the background, the woman said, "The legend the tree spirits told you is the story of the insatiable boy. This is your story."

"What do you mean, aunty?" they asked.

### ✦ Story of the Insatiable Boy ✦<sup>100</sup>

"When this land was covered in what you call, 'Gondwanian rainforest', and many of the modern-day animals did not yet exist, some very restless nature spirits found out how to use fire for their own benefit. They intended to take advantage of it by using its destructive power to germinate their seeds and clear a path in the forest that would allow them to spread unchecked."

"The first eucalypts," guessed the boy with the strange accent.

"Yes. Those spirits became the first eucalypts. When they appeared for the first time, the other spirits of the forest got together to decide what to do. They eventually agreed that they would send the eucalypts up North, where the land embraces the warm sea. Since the forest was lush and damp up there, they thought that it would never burn and that there would never be the right conditions for the eucalypts to spread and take over. Up North they would be forced to live in harmony with the other species."

"This would have happened about 62 million years ago, at the beginning of the Palaeogene period, when the first eucalypts are thought to have appeared," said the boy with the strange accent.

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<sup>100</sup> Legend inspired in the story narrated by: Gunwinggu Oenpelli "In the womb of the Rainbow Serpent" 2003. *JoyZine*. 8 October 2007 <<http://www.artistwd.com/joyzine/australia/dreaming/womb.php>>

"Then, the fires began," said the matriarch.

"In the Oligocene period, 34 million years ago, the forest became more arid and so fires were common. This would have created ideal conditions for eucalypts to spread until they covered most of the continent," said the boy.

"When there were just a few pockets of the Gondwanian rainforest left—where most of the animal and plant species remained—the spirits of the forest met again," said Leena, repeating what she had learned from the mountain ash. "In this meeting, they agreed that each species would bring a fair amount of souls—those souls who became the first humans."

"The souls of all those plants and animals—then in human bodies—made sure they protected the last remnants of the rainforest," said the boy from Ceja de Selva. "That is how those eucalypts who decided to integrate, became the mountain ash trees."

"I see you've followed the thread of the story," said Mama Tuk, approvingly.

She knew that this tale repeated itself throughout the ages. The characters changed, so did the backdrop; but certain tendencies always found expression in some form or other. No matter how much one tried to avoid them, the day always came when they manifested once more.

"So, the insatiable nature of the eucalypts ended up manifesting in humans," the woman went on. "Their eternally restless spirits found a new form of expression."

"What happened?" asked the boy from Ceja de Selva.

"Another meeting was held, but this time among the humans. They decided that anyone who could not live in harmony with the earth and be satisfied with what she offered, would have to leave."

"Did they send them up North, like they did the eucalypts?" asked the boy with the strange accent.

"Yes, but this time, even further. They asked them to walk north, until they reached the warm ocean, then to cross it, and settle on the big continent beyond."

"Eurasia!" cried the boy with the strange accent.

"What happened after that?" asked Leena, eager to find out how the story ended.

"For a long time we did not hear any news of them. Our lives continued as they always had. Even so, we had a feeling that they would return. That was what happened with the insatiable trees, so it seemed highly likely that the same thing would occur with the insatiable humans. Then, one day, they did come back."

Now the three youths were able to put the story into its historical perspective—with the arrival of the Europeans to austral lands; lands they had deemed to belong to no one (*terra nullius*).

"The first two hundred years after their return were difficult because these unsatisfied people exploited this land in the same way that they had their own. They razed everything. But from the ashes, some very special eucalypts grew."

"The equivalent of the mountain ash—but among the humans!" Leena cried. "This is what some of the new arrivals became, when they agreed to live among the natives and learn from them, instead of trying to change them."

"That is correct," said the Mama Tuk, nodding. "Those who had once caused the most destruction to Nature became its most fierce

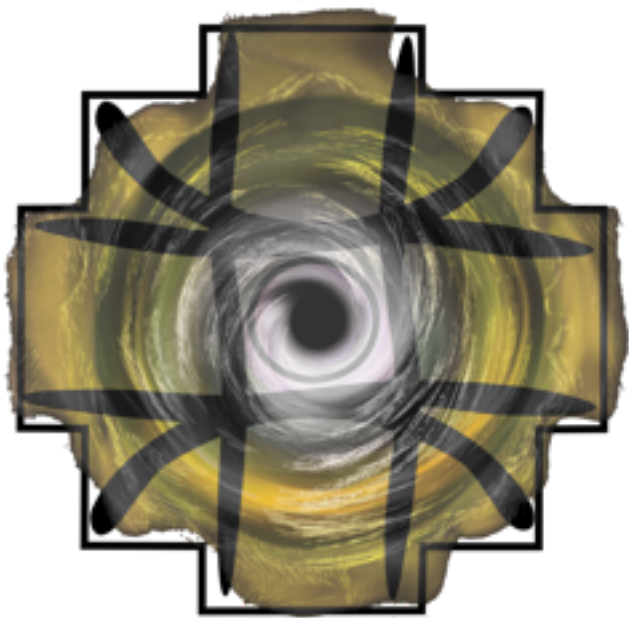
protectors, which meant that they turned out to be the human equivalents of the majestic mountain ash. Often, one needs to make mistakes to wake up and find a way to set things to rights.

Just as Don Antonio Morales, an Andean master, prophesied:

*The new caretakers of the Earth will come from the West, and those that have made the greatest impact on Mother Earth now have the moral responsibility to remake their relationship with Her, after remaking themselves.*

...✚...

*Ether*



## 5. The Meeting Point



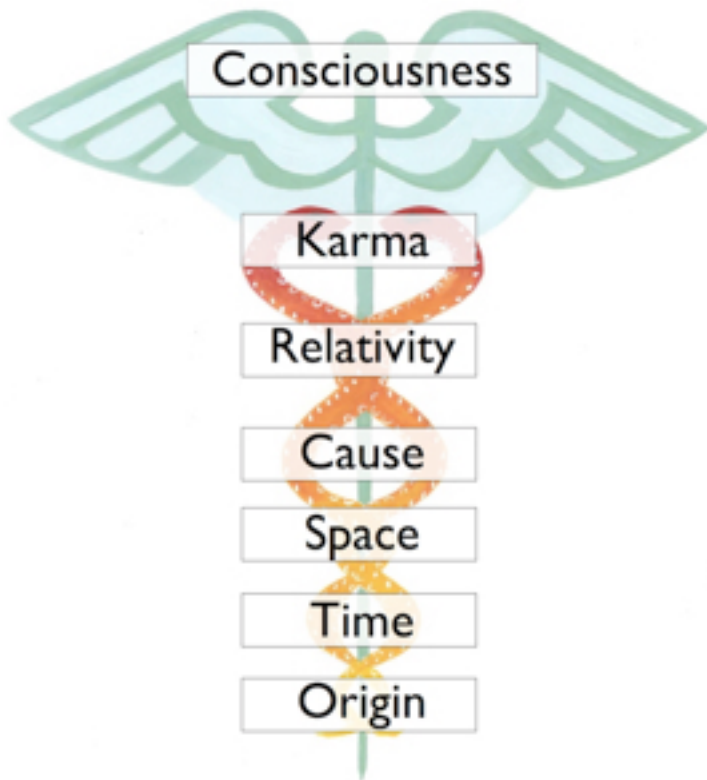
The meeting point is the ocean  
where all the waters pour,  
where the rivers join,  
and the directions converge.

In the cross this is the intersection;  
in the pyramid, its apex;  
in the wheel, its axis;  
in the solar system, the Sun;  
in the galaxy, its core;  
and in humans it is that point between the eyebrows  
that allows us to perceive reality as it is,  
beyond the mind that filters, decorates, and deforms;  
that fragments and limits;  
that clouds and cuts one off from the Truth.



## 🐼 The Seven Notes of the Scale

AT THE MEETING point our protagonists gather to debate the following seven concepts: *origin*, *time*, *space*, *cause*, *relativity*, *karma*, and *consciousness*. From now on, the level of depth will increase, as the subjects become a little more profound.



Despite the increasing philosophical depth, I have continued to use dialogue as a form of literary expression so as to facilitate the reading. These are conversations held in the esoteric *Mastay*, the place David is led by the magpie after contemplating the nine

astral realms. This place represents the level from which our intuitions and inner wisdom emanate, described in particular traditions as 'Paradise' or 'Eden'. It's a place I call 'the Meeting Point': the centre of the square formed by the four elements of antiquity and the four cardinal points.

The Meeting Point symbolises the station where the inner journey towards transcendence begins. Transcendence is beyond the limitations of form, thought, and duality. One example of this is described during Vivek's second mystical experience, at the foot of the Gangotri Glacier. It might be seen as *the other shore*, an indescribable place to which words cannot do justice. It is a state of consciousness that one might only attain through the combination of one's perseverance and divine grace.

However, duality and language still exist at the Meeting Point, as you will come to see in the following dialogues. Nevertheless, here one has attained a level of consciousness in which one recognises that we ourselves are not necessarily certain, and at which we fully accept others, a level that Fatima's grandfather calls *the fourth stage of love or love with acceptance*. We should enter into it as an integrated humanity in order to advance to the next stage: loving others as a mother loves her child.

### 🦉 Dialogue on the Origin

We use different names,  
to define what is truly One.

We take different paths,  
to a single destination.

And so, it is best not to lose ourselves in names or on paths,  
for names are only tags,  
and paths are merely landscapes.



THE TWO MEN had already been talking for a while. David wandered aimlessly from one side of the forest clearing to the other, his mind clouded with conflicting thoughts.

“East and West,” he said. “We’re like the two hemispheres of the brain. We need and complement each other, although each comprehends through a completely opposite mode of reasoning.”

“We’re like the River Ganges and the Yamuna: separated at the source, but reunited at the mouth,” said Vivek, following his companion with his eyes.

“What do you mean?” David asked, stopping to turn his full attention on Vivek.

“We have similar origins, like the two sacred rivers that find their birth high up in the Himalayan Mountains. And just as both rivers reunite at the junction<sup>101</sup> at a future time our knowledge will also unite in one flow. But, tell me, you appear to have come here from a time further in the future than mine; what have your contemporaries revealed about the origins of the Universe?”

“We say that the Universe is expanding,” David replied. “What we’re not sure about is whether this expansion will continue indefinitely or whether it will just arrive at a certain point, and then begin to contract. It all depends on whether or not the Universe can reach a critical mass. If it can, there will be a point at which

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<sup>101</sup> The River Yamuna and the Ganges come together at Allahabad. The point of confluence is called *Triveni Sangam*, and it is said that the mythical Saraswati River also has its confluence at this spot.

everything begins to draw in as a result of its own gravitational pull; like an object that, thrown into the air, is caught by the force of the earth's gravitational field and falls to the ground. But if this mass is not reached, the Universe will continue expanding forever, like the ripples of a stone thrown into a lake. This is what we're unsure of."

"But if time is cyclical and, as such, repeats itself indefinitely, how can you doubt that the Universe will one day start to contract?" Vivek asked.

"We interpret time linearly. It's difficult for us to comprehend the idea that an event must be repeated again and again forever. To us, every hour, every minute, every second, is unique and unrepeatable."

The eastern man was very surprised to hear this. Looking puzzled, he said, "Night and day; the phases of the moon; the seasons; the movement of the planets; the rise and fall of empires; the object which, thrown into the air, returns to be thrown again; the droplet of water that returns to the sea. It seems that everything we know is repeated..."

"Yes, but we believe that the future doesn't necessarily have to be like the past. The probability that the Sun will come up tomorrow is high, but we can never be totally sure," David replied.

"It's a curious way of thinking. But what proof do you need to deduce that all expansion is followed by contraction? That all evolution ends in an involution to the source? That all outward movement is counteracted by an inward displacement?"

"Is that its heartbeat?" Fatima whispered, as though to herself. She had been sitting silent for a long time, submerged in a contemplative state, so the two men had not known that she had been following their conversation. She rose slowly and

deliberately. Then, with outstretched arms, she looked to the sky and exclaimed, "The day will come when we will roll up heaven like a scroll to be stored with the records. As we began the first creation, so shall we repeat it."<sup>102</sup>

"Do you mean to say that you see the Universe expanding and you also believe in its future contraction?" David asked.

"I see it expanding because the prophet Muhammad said that Allah created the heaven with strength and that He is expanding it.<sup>103</sup> He also revealed to us that, originally, the heavens and the earth were joined and that Allah separated them.<sup>104</sup> His words are written in the holy Qur'an. I believe in the contraction of the Universe, because I know that, like the scroll, it will one day have to be rolled up so that it might be unrolled once again.

"Knowing this," she said as though to herself, "what more do I need to ask about Existence and the Cosmos? To understand the Universe, one has only to feel its beat, and this can only be felt with the heart (*Qalb*), not with the mind (*Nafs*)."

"The Big Bang theory confirms that the Universe is the result of an explosion of a singularity which was so dense, that matter, space, and time were condensed at a single point," David said. "With the Big Bang these three principles were manifested. Before this instant, matter, space, and time existed in a potential, but not in an actual state. And so, if your heavens are space and the earth is matter, then we are saying essentially the same thing."

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<sup>102</sup> Qur'an – Surah 21 verse 104.

<sup>103</sup> Qur'an – Surah 51 verse 47.

<sup>104</sup> Qur'an – Surah 21 verse 30.

“In our case,” Vivek explained, “space (*akasha*) constitutes the expansion of the cosmos reached in a ‘*kalpa*’<sup>105</sup>—a great but finite period of time. For us, one ‘day of Brahma’<sup>106</sup> measures two *kalpas*. The first *kalpa* represents Brahma’s daylight hours, during which the Creation is expanded, and the second constitutes His night, the time when the creation is reabsorbed back into the matrix of all energy (*Hiranyagarbha*). In the Vedas<sup>107</sup> it is written that at the dawn of each one of Brahma’s new days an explosion (*Bindu Visphot*) takes place, causing infinite waves of expansion. With each explosion, time, space, and matter are manifested—realities that will later be reabsorbed into the final dissolution of the Cosmos (*Pralaya*). Our sages believe that this cycle of creation and dissolution does not have a beginning (*anaadi*), or an end (*ananta*). To express it symbolically, they use the cosmic dance of the god, Shiva<sup>108</sup>.”

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<sup>105</sup> According to the Puranas (Hindu religious texts), one *kalpa* lasts 4.32 billion years.

<sup>106</sup> In *Advaita Vedānta*, a doctrine of non-duality, Brahman embodies “the Absolute”. This concept is similar to the monotheistic idea of God, but without the dualistic notion we see in Christianity which separates good and evil, associating good with God and evil with Satan. In *Advaita Vedānta* we see monism, an idea of the Absolute which asserts that Brahman is everything, and so nothing can be external from Brahman—not even evil. This vision of Brahman should not be confused with the Hindu conception of the Trimurti or “trinity of Hinduism” formed by the figures, Brahmā, Vishnú and Shivá. In the trinity, the monistic vision of Brahman is divided into three.

<sup>107</sup> The sacred scriptures from the old Vedic civilisation.

<sup>108</sup> Like Brahmā, Shivá also symbolises one of the three principles of the trinity—in this case the Destroyer. Hinduism doesn’t have a doctrine, but is the product of several philosophical currents and sects that, throughout history, have shared the same geography (the Indian Subcontinent). One of these currents is *Kashmir Shaivism*, a philosophy in which Shiva symbolises the Creator, like Brahman in Vedānta. According to this, reality is manifested as a result of Shiva’s dance, the *Spanda* or “primordial pulsation”.

Fatima started to whirl then, her arms outstretched, palms facing the sky, in a kind of dervish dance. As she danced, she recited the words of a poem:

“It is the nectar that makes me heady when I see you,  
oh my beloved.  
Thou, who dances with the constellations at your feet  
and infinity in your gaze.  
Dance so that I can remember you, not five times a day  
—but for all eternity.  
Apart from this, for what else could I wish!”

Fatima's dance caught Mama Tuk's attention, who, up until now, had been deeply absorbed in painting an image on a canvas at her feet. Vivek, realising that she might also want to take part in their conversation, asked, "And you, coming from the South, do you have myths and legends that explain the origin of the Universe?"

Mama Tuk looked at the man and, in a serene tone said, “Our culture is more ancient than myths and legends. It comes straight from the Dreaming.”

The poetess stopped dancing and looked at the woman with tenderness in her eyes. "What dream do you mean?" she asked.

“The Dreaming<sup>109</sup> encompasses three realities,” Mama Tuk replied. “First, it embodies the state of the seed.”

“The period before the Big Bang, when time, space, and matter still had not been manifested?” David asked.

“Perhaps, yes,” she replied. “Although I don’t understand what you mean by ‘before,’ given that even trees exist as seeds in their

<sup>109</sup> 'The Dreamtime' refers to a space—that in which the dream takes or took place. 'The Dreaming', on the other hand, denotes time beyond time. Rather than being thought of as exactly the same, these two may be differentiated in a similar way to the distinction made between the concept of 'the past' and 'space-time'.

fruit; and because of this it cannot be said that the seed comes before the tree. Both exist, but in two different realities.”

“He is referring to the initial, potential state (*Hiranyagarbha*),” Vivek said.

“So it may be, although when I look at the seed, I already see it as the fully realised plant; not as mere potential—but as the tree it already is, albeit in another reality.”

“And the second reality that the Dreaming encompasses?” Vivek asked.

“If we see the first reality as representing a canvas and the desire to paint on it, in the second we begin to paint,” she said. “This second reality; however, is not painted by us, but by the creative ancestors.”

“Creative ancestors?” Fatima asked.

“They are beings like us, who live in the Dreamtime. Their actions from this ‘place’ define the reality that surrounds us. They model the environment, with the rivers, valleys and mountains, and they do it with their wishes and the actions that follow them. The vibration of each place tells us these stories, and we tell them in the world through words, dances, rituals, painting, or music.”

“You mean that the creative ancestors gave life to the environment, through their actions carried out from the Dreamtime?” David asked.

“Yes,” Mama Tuk replied. “The forms and features of everything that surrounds us tell us about the actions of the creative ancestors; actions that are a consequence of their yearnings—of their desires. It’s similar to what I do when I paint on a canvas. From the reality defined by the Dreamtime, the creative ancestor paint our reality—that which we see. This is why, among our

people, when someone wants to join a conversation, the first thing they ask is: 'what reality are you talking about?'"

"The reality of the Dreamtime or everyday reality," Vivek said, beginning to understand.

"Yes," Mama Tuk replied.

"You said that the Dreaming is made up of three realities: the potential, or the canvas before it is painted; the one of the creative ancestors; and a third... What is that?" Fatima asked.

"The third is the reality which stems from our actions. Just as the quarrels of the creative ancestors form the mountains, the rivers, and the valleys that surround us, we can also alter the features of our environment by expressing our wishes through actions. This reality represents the canvas itself, repainted by those who are here supposedly only to contemplate it." She paused.

Mama Tuk had herself come from the third reality, from what the others called, 'the potential future'. In this so-called future, the world's inhabitants were suffering from the consequences caused by the actions of Vivek, Fatima and David's contemporaries. In Mama Tuk's reality, it was the fellow citizens of these three who had altered the balance of the painting called 'Nature'. This reunion was an opportunity for her to communicate to the three other great civilisations what might be the results of those actions, and thereby try to minimise these future repercussions. Because of this, Mama Tuk thought it very important to correctly define the third reality.

"Can you see these ancestors?" David asked.

"Yes, I see them in everything around us because they leave their vibratory imprint on the rocks, rivers, plants, animals—and even on us human beings. If we observe this, it can serve as a

reminder that our actions have the potential to transform the environment. It reminds us that there are certain emotions that it is best to avoid. In the dances and rituals we express these emotions since they directly connect us with the Dreamtime. In this way, we avoid expressing negative emotions in the world—in the dream that you call ‘the material world’.

“By acting in this way,” she went on, “we also avoid affecting the third reality, that realm where those who are not yet born live. They are none other than ourselves, those who will return again to inhabit the reality that we have helped to manifest. For this reason we, the Earth People, contemplate the painting and represent it as we see it. We know that we are the painting and that everything that happens to it also happens to us.”

“All four of us are saying essentially the same thing,” Vivek concluded. “We recognise that there is a state of potentiality that existed prior to manifestation. For those who come from the South, this is the first reality of the Dreaming, with the canvas stretched and ready to be painted, its potentiality defined by the wishes of the creative ancestors. For those who come from the West, it is the moment just before the Big Bang, before time, space, and matter were manifested out of the singularity. For those from the North, it symbolises the period before the expansion of Allah’s heavens. And for those of us who come from the East, it’s the matrix of all energy (*Hiranyagarbha*) that precedes the point of explosion (*Bindu Visphot*).

## ☯ Dialogue on Time

Time emanates from the mind of the observer.

Without a mind, there is no time;  
without time, no space;

without space, no multiplicity;  
without multiplicity, no ego;  
without ego, no thought;  
and without thought, there is no mind.



THE FOUR AGREED, satisfied to see that they all shared a vision where the only major difference was the language and symbology they used to express it. But the *Mastay* didn't only constitute a place that had enabled them to find that which made them similar. It was also a realm where differences could be identified, so that each might gain enrichment from the others. It was a place where tonalities were combined, obtained from different interpretations of reality, so as to realise a painting where all colours and contrasts were represented. This was why the woman from the South, a painter who was conscious of the richness born of contrast and shade, went on to say:

“Even though we four recognise the existence of a reality where there are dreams without actions, potentiality without manifestation, or a seed without a tree, where we differ is in our perception of time.”

“What do you mean?” the others asked.

“You are children of agriculture, and as such you organise all events according to that which you call ‘time’, with your ‘before’ and ‘after’—with a previous and a posterior moment. You live in the seasons of the year, with the planting and harvesting periods. You live in the phases of the Moon, with the waning and waxing cycles. You live in the movement of the stars—with their transits. For this

reason, you talk of the point before the moment of Creation, of that period in which even time didn't exist. But if time still had not been manifested, how can you talk of a prior instant? You are so preoccupied with ordering everything in time that you don't realise your own incoherencies—the contradiction of placing non-time in time. For my people, on the other hand, it doesn't make sense to talk of a phenomenon occurring prior to another one. For us, one reality is like a seed and the other is the tree, it's the manifestation of the seed's potentiality, and no time separates them. Only our mind does this. One reality exists in one state of consciousness, and another in a different state. And so, we can recover even the potential state if we are capable of moving ourselves into the first reality."

"But without events arranged in a timeline, how can you interpret the past?" David asked.

"What you call 'the past' is in the here and now—in the geography surrounding us; the outline of the mountains; the paths traced by the rivers, and the features of the valleys. When we need to refer to them, we cross over to the Dreamtime and from there we interpret and understand. This understanding, as I said before, causes us to measure our actions and the desires that motivate them, and makes us conscious of the fact that those actions can still affect our surroundings. But your inheritance, as the sons and daughters of farmers has caused you constantly to seek to transform the environment. Your people are like the wind that wears away the mountain peaks; like water, sculpting the deep gorges; and like fire, transforming vegetation to ash, so that eucalyptus seeds germinate and a new cycle can begin. In the same way that I paint on this canvas, you have made Nature your fabric—an object to change, not to contemplate. Each of you differs only in intensity—but not in your desire to do it. But for us, we apprehend beauty by contemplating space without trying to alter it. That's

why we are the Earth People; of this Planet Earth, without which there would be neither fruit to eat nor people to eat it.”

“Although it’s true that agriculture has made us more dependent on the calendar, I think that our perception of time is also different,” David said.

“What do you mean?” Fatima asked.

“My time is linear. I use it to define objectives and work towards attaining them. I speak of the future; of what there is to do; of what there is to accomplish. Maybe that’s why we have been able to affect our surroundings with such intensity.”

“Like fire,” Fatima said. “A fire that always tries to rise higher towards the sky, reaching further and further from its source.”

“A fire that, if it burns the undergrowth, regenerates the land; but if it reaches the tops of the trees, burns the whole forest to the ground,” added Mama Tuk. “You are sons of the insatiable boy of whom our stories speak, the one who was devoured by the Rainbow Serpent and taken to the North. But don’t forget that others live in the past; like water, which is always in search of a way back to the ocean.”

“The past is the short, intense experience that, once lived, stays with you always,” Fatima said.

“The past is a cancelled cheque,” David said.

“The past is a day in the future,” the philosopher said.

“Yours is the third vision,” Mama Tuk said to Vivek, while painting circles on the canvas, “—the past as a day in the future with time repeating itself. Time is cyclical, like the air, which comes and goes, rises and falls, and whirls, always eddying. That’s why your wise ones don’t place too much importance on the future or the past. The past could be a day in the future—but you have

already lived the future in the past. That's how they try to live in the present moment, because in the cycle of time, this is the only moment that really has meaning."

"In Hindi they use the same word to say 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'!" David exclaimed. "The word is '*kal*'."

"Hindi?" Vivek asked.

"The language my contemporaries speak where you come from," David explained.

"Well, if it comes from the Sanskrit word, *kāla*, it simply means 'time,'" Vivek said.

"Yes, it does come from the Sanskrit word. Hindi often drops the final 'a' of Sanskrit words. So that attests to the fact that, for you, the past and the future come to be the same thing," David said.

The four of them grew silent. This was a thoughtful silence, the kind that preceded a change in direction of the conversation. First, they had spoken about origins, and of the similarities in their ways of interpreting them. Afterwards, they had discussed the concept of time, and how they perceived it from different perspectives. Now, they would talk about space.

### 🗨️ Dialogue on Space

Space emanates from multiplicity,  
when we split what is unique and absolute.

This makes us believe ourselves to be individuals,  
to be limited,  
to be small.

It is like a mirror.  
In it we see our reflection,

and believe ourselves to be the image,  
or the object reflected,  
when in reality we are the light itself.

We are the light that created the mirror,  
the cast image and the reflected object.



MAMA TUK SET off down a small track that headed southward. At first her three companions were surprised, unsure whether she wanted them to follow her or whether she was simply leaving. Reading their thoughts, the woman turned and gestured for them to follow. This was the path tread by the Earth People, a path that had not been roamed by the other three for a long time. While Mama Tuk led the way, they ambled along behind, barefoot and unhurried.

At first nobody spoke. The three children of farming did not know how to walk this path, because for some it was completely unknown, and for others, it was nothing more than a memory that had been long forgotten. Mama Tuk, on the other hand, seemed to observe every detail of the landscape, every crevice, every pebble on the ground; she seemed conscious of even the most insignificant insects, of the leaf tumbling in the morning breeze, and the Sun's light caught in every dewdrop. She walked as if she was the space itself, as if she was the path, and the path was a reflection of her thoughts. She walked like someone who sang with each breath, the track caressed by her gaze.

As she walked, she spoke, resuming the conversation that they had left unfinished in the forest clearing. "For my people, time is a

continuity written in the particulars of space. We do not live in the tomorrow, or in the yesterday, or in the now—we live in the ‘here’. The here is a song that we are always singing. In the here we find the answers to yesterday’s questions. These are written in the vibratory imprint of the mountains, valleys, and rivers. They are written in the type of vegetation that grows and the animals that live in it. They all come from the Dreaming. With our stories, dances, paintings, and songs we recover that Dreamtime; we recall experiences insofar as they have a practical application in the here—if they help us to find water, food, or show us how to prepare medicines.”

“But without leaving written records, how can you recall your past?” David asked.

“The here is always being sung. First we remember the *songline* passed down by our ancestors; then we sing it; and it is only then that the melody projects itself as the space around us. This is why we do not need to write things down to remember them; we need only know how to read. The natural features around us provide the alphabet, and from reading them we know our past. For example, when we see paper, the only thing we need to know to understand its past is that it was once a tree and that it is now just dead pulp.”

The woman pointed to the horizon with the stick she had used as a brush, and her three companions followed her gesture. “By living in the here!” she exclaimed, striking the ground with its end, “not only can we know the yesterday, but it also allows us to live fully in the now—and to experience the tomorrow. The now is the reality we try to preserve while we read the tomorrow in the effects our actions have on the environment; so the Dream still continues. This is why, when we see our presence starting to wear out the vital energy of our surroundings, we leave in search of a new site to camp. We are sensitive to the environment and we live

in close connection to it. This is how we guarantee that balance is maintained and Nature is preserved. It is the way we acknowledge that even us—the original inhabitants—can affect our surroundings; and also how we recognise that we are an extension of them. This is our way of affirming that everything is in motion, and of attuning ourselves to this rhythm. Not through theories, but through practice; with the heart of a nomad, who sleeps every night under the same firmament, but on different patch of earth.”

“Where I come from, we only see information on paper,” David said sadly. “In a hamburger, we do not see the animal that sacrificed its life to feed us—we see only its calories. When we see a car, we do not think about the ten thousand components that were taken from the earth to construct it. To us, it is an object of status—it defines our identity.”

“If you do not see the tree in the paper, or the animal that gave its life to feed you,” replied Mama Tuk, “it is because you have broken the umbilical cord that connects us all to the Mother. Agriculture is the first cause of this distancing; but when you entrust the cultivation of the land to others, this separation is reinforced. That is why you need to return to Her bosom, because only that can nourish you. You must return to Mother Nature, because we humans are like babies who are still too small and vulnerable to be weaned, but who have already learned how to crawl. Like toddlers, we pick up everything we find and put it in our mouth, without knowing if it will nourish or harm us.”

Their conversations about time and space had affirmed to each of them that every civilisation, every clan, provided a different conception of these ideas. Those from the Thunderbird Clan—from the West—lived mainly in the future. They were the visionaries, and their visions always pertained to events that were yet to be. Although their dreams will never be realised if we ruin the very

foundation on which they are built. Those from the Frog Clan, who came from the Tropic of Cancer—to the north of the equator—lived in the past. Their challenge was to stop holding to the nostalgia of yesterday, so that they might recover their path—a path of peace and brotherhood. The people of the Butterfly Clan—who came from the East—lived in the present. They were the wise ones, but they needed to integrate the positive qualities of the other three clans if they were to fully realise their own wisdom. Finally, the representatives of the Tortoise Clan, who came from the Tropic of Capricorn—to the south of the equator—lived in the here. Their role was to teach the other clans to care for and heal the Mother. To do this, they needed to show that the Mother existed in the here—in every corner of what they called “Nature”.

These differences bestowed upon each clan—each civilisation—a different responsibility. Uniting these strengths was the ultimate aim of the *Mastay*.

### 🦉 Dialogue on the Cause

Cause is the effect of separating in time and in space,  
that which is unique and inseparable.

Therefore, without the mental projections  
of time and space:  
cause and effect become one.



VIVEK, DAVID AND Fatima followed Mama Tuk along the path, trying to keep up with her. Each of these three represented a

civilisation that was proud to have the knowledge to plant the seed and harvest its fruit without needing to rely on Nature to do it for them; a society proud to think that it understood, and that this entitled it to dominate Nature for its own benefit. Now, the representatives of these cultures walked barefoot, looking down humbly at the path for fear of hurting themselves. They had just learned that Nature was not an object to dominate, but a mother. Now they realised that, for all their dominance, they had not even been able to wean themselves from this mother.

“In a baby’s world, there is always a period where the infant thinks that the mother’s only purpose is to satisfy its needs,” Mama Tuk said. “This is the period that you seem to be leaving behind.”

“You say that agriculture was the first cause that distanced us from the Mother,” Vivek said. “We, who have lived in the fertile valleys bathed by the seven holy rivers for time immemorial, understand the principle of cause as an inseparable trinity. For us, cause is understood by its relationship with time and space, and these are related to our three gods. The god Brahmā, represents ‘cause’—the creative principle; Vishnu embodies ‘space’—the preserving principle; and Shiva symbolises ‘time’—the principle of transformation or destruction.”

“Could you please explain this a bit more?” David asked.

“Brahmā, the creative principle, is linked to the concept of cause, given that every creation needs a cause in order to manifest. Vishnu, the preserver, is associated with space, because preservation requires space to remain unaltered. Shiva, as the transformer, is linked to time, because it is time itself that causes everything to change and perish. So, as you can see, every phenomenon in Nature comes from a cause, is manifested and preserved in space, and is subject to transformation in time.

Comprehending these three principles results in the understanding of Nature.”

“In contrast to your philosophy is the science of my people, which incorporates the principle of chance,” David said. “Science has helped us to demystify the world, to study it as if it were a machine—as if it didn’t have a soul. We can describe how the Universe was created by reference to space and time; but we cannot explain the cause that brought it to be created. Because of this, my people have defined two paths—that of science and that of religion. Religion tries to interpret and explain that which brought the Universe into existence, while science studies the effects of time and space related to those events.”

“How can you explain the breath that gives life to this inert flesh if you study the flesh but not the breath itself?” Fatima asked, pinching her arm.

“You have forgotten the womb that bore you,” added Mama Tuk.

“If this science was brought into being ignoring the cause—one of the three fundamental aspects that make up reality—it follows that the interpretation of reality you get from it will always be fragmented and incomplete.” Vivek said. “In spite of this, I don’t doubt that the trinity between cause, space, and time is still present in that other branch of wisdom you call ‘religion’. As my people have never interpreted these two aspects of reality as separate, we have never needed a discipline to study the cause (religion) and another to study time and space (science). This is why I find it difficult to understand the difference between both paths of thought. So tell me, please, what are the attributes that those who study on the path of religion give to the first cause?”

“The religion practiced in the land where I come from speaks of only one god who has three attributes—omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence,” replied the scientist.

“So your people’s god is omnipresent in space, by existing everywhere; is omniscient in time, by being all-knowing of present, past, and future; and is omnipotent in cause, by being capable of anything,” Vivek said. “Before, I spoke to you about the trinity formed by the three principles of, creation, preservation, and transformation. In order to better understand these principles we bestow upon them divine attributes. But when we group the three concepts together as one to contemplate them as a single divinity, we give this divinity these qualities: it is One, Infinite and Eternal— infinite in space; eternal in time; and one as the first and only cause. In this way, we affirm that this single principle is beyond the trinity; that before being three it was one, and it never stopped being so.”

“Polytheist and monotheist at the same time,” David said.

“Well, that sounds like labelling, and labels limit rather than help to expand,” Vivek said. “It is better to think about it with reference to a story we have in our tradition.”

#### ✦ Legend of the Trimurti and the Girl ✦<sup>110</sup>

“It is said that the three gods of the *trimurti*, Brahmā, Vishnu, and Shiva, were boasting about their powers. To demonstrate his, Brahmā made an object appear, as if he was a magician. Then Vishnu exhibited his influence by preserving it, while all the other objects in its vicinity decayed. Shiva stepped in then, touching the object to make it disintegrate in an instant. In this way, the three gods flaunted their powers.

“Suddenly, a girl approached them and, turning to Brahmā, asked, ‘Oh God Brahmā, Creator of All, can you make another girl, identical to me, that I can play with?’

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<sup>110</sup> This story is inspired by a traditional Hindu myth

“Brahmā burst out laughing and replied, ‘That’s easy, my girl. I only have to will it and your double shall appear.’ But in spite of his words, the second girl did not materialise, and Brahmā reddened in shame. And so, the girl turned to Vishnu, saying, ‘Oh, Vishnu, I see that your companion cannot create a playmate for me; but can you, God of Preservation, keep everything the same so that I can at least entertain myself?’

“Vishnu furrowed his brow in an attempt to keep all in the space around them unaltered. But as hard as he tried, everything except the three gods and the little girl disintegrated around them.

“Shiva, becoming angry with the scene, threw a look of disdain at the girl and said, ‘You wanted to play, but now you will see how I make you disappear, so that you learn to respect the Gods of the Trinity!’ But, as hard as he tried, the little girl remained, while the three gods watched their own bodies disintegrating.

“Then, when only the girl was left, without objects or space or time or any of the three gods, she said, ‘Don’t forget that, in spite of your being an expression of the three principles that govern the Universe, you are still nothing more than three qualities that emanate from the unique and absolute principle—that which encompasses everything; that which is everything; that which is almighty.’”

...✚...

When Vivek had finished his story, David asked, “Do you mean that with science we have forgotten one of the aspects that make up this trinity?”

“Yes, and because of this your understanding is partial and incomplete; and the method you follow in search of knowledge is flawed,” Vivek replied.

“What do you mean by flawed?” David asked.

“For us, the first cause is present right from the beginning. We start with the totality, and once that is understood we can then go on to explain its parts. But it seems to me that your people have established a process which does not have a first cause. So I wonder—how do you carry out the process of reasoning?”

“We start by studying its parts in the hope that, by doing so, we might come to understand the whole,” David replied. “We study the most basic components that we can perceive or infer, and from these—from their properties and the laws that govern them—we try to understand the totality.”

“Do all of your philosophical schools do the same?” asked the man from the East.

“What do you mean by ‘philosophical schools’? We only have one method—what we call ‘the scientific method’. That is the only one we use.”

“We have six philosophical schools (*darshanas*). Each one of these looks at things from a slightly different perspective. This allows them to be encouraged by the findings of the others so that they might go on investigating origins and the Cosmos. One of these philosophical schools, called, *Vaisheshika*, confirms that the only valid knowledge is that which can be perceived (*pratyaksha*) or inferred (*anumāna*). They deduce that the material world is not eternal, but that it was formed by an infinite number of *paramāṇus*, which are considered to be the most basic units of matter.”

“We call them ‘atoms,’” David said.

“Yes, but even the *Vaisheshika* School affirms that these atoms respond to the will of a primary cause—of a Supreme Being. And, what’s more, my people know that it would be absurd to restrict knowledge to that school’s contributions. It would be too limiting...”

“But if that school’s knowledge is empirical—that is, it affirms that the only valid knowledge is that which is based on sensory perception or inferred from laws that might be demonstrated through the senses—how could it assert the existence of a Supreme Being?”

“They believe in the Supreme Being because to deny it would be to deny the primary cause, given that it would mean forgetting one of the three aspects that make up the trinity,” Vivek replied.

“That reminds me of a story,” Fatima said shyly.

“Tell us, please,” the others said.

#### ✦ Parable of the Monarch Who Wanted to see God ✦

“This story took place when Islam was in its greatest period of expansion, a little after the death of the Prophet, peace be upon him. It is said that a king, who doubted that there was only one God, summoned all his *ulemas* (scholars) and asked them to show him where the Highest One lived. His father had converted to Islam when the king was still a prince and, since then, the number of conversions in his kingdom had multiplied. As he had never accepted his father’s decision to embrace this new faith, the young monarch decided, after his father’s death, that the best way to return to the old tradition was to question the existence of the so-called One God. With this in mind, he asked for the One to be shown to him. The ulemas began reciting verses from the Qur’an describing Allah’s attributes. In spite of their explanations, the sovereign was unsatisfied and he dismissed all those learned men as the first step in his attempt to return to the ancient customs.

“After a short time,” Fatima went on, “he established a royal decree which stipulated that, if nobody showed him beyond a doubt the existence of the One God, he would order the people of his kingdom to abandon the new faith. Although many people went

to the palace and tried to persuade him otherwise, the monarch didn't seem willing to change his mind. His advisors explained how, thanks to Islam, the constant state of war with neighbouring kingdoms had ended because they too had converted. The merchants came to speak to him of the trade routes that had been established with faraway lands, routes that would be broken if the faith was abandoned. Others argued that, within the new religion, they were now all brothers. They described how, under the new faith, the rich were obliged to give charity to the poor and hospitality to strangers, diminishing social differences and making travelling safer. They tried to communicate to him that Islam had brought peace, prosperity, and stability to the kingdom.

"However," Fatima said, "the monarch was unwilling to accept their arguments because, so they say, he didn't believe in the existence of only one god. Desperate, the people asked a holy man who was passing through the kingdom to visit the sovereign and persuade him of the importance of keeping the faith. He accepted, and headed straight to the palace. When the king saw him, he asked, 'Show me the One God or I shall renounce the new faith.'

"The Sufi adjusted the woollen blanket covering him and, extending his arm, pointed to everything around them, saying, '*La illaha illa Allah*. There is nothing but God. Tell me, then, what you see that is not the Divine, so that I can show it to you; since in order to show you the Almighty, as you ask and wish, I need to do it in reference to something that is not the All-Comprehending.'

"The monarch, faced with the impossibility of showing the Sufi something that was not the Omnipresent, had to give in. The holy man had forced him to understand that seeing God as separate from His Creations—as a commander sitting on a throne before all He governed—was absurd. The king decided to embrace the new faith and from then on Islam prospered in those faraway lands."

...✚...

“What an inspiring story,” murmured her three companions.

“The master Sufi was very astute to respond with a paradox—by posing the question in the negative. We also apply this method,” said the man of science. “This affirms the relativity of the world around us.”

The four of them stood in silence for a time, trying to understand the significance of everything that had been said. Then David asked Fatima, “How many centuries have passed since the Prophet died in the period of history that you come from?”

“The Prophet, peace be upon him, died six centuries ago,” she replied.

“So you seem to have come from the end of our thirteenth century,” David said, drawing an X followed by three strokes, on the ground. “I’m living more than seven hundred years after this, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.”

“Are you still using those figures that don’t allow the good algebra to work?” Fatima asked.

“No. We adopted the Arabic numerals. We also combined other aspects of your method of knowledge with classical Greek literature, recovered from Arabic translations. Around the sixteenth century the Renaissance took place. The original motivation of the Renaissance was to explain phenomenal reality without needing to refer to the primary cause.”

“Why run from it?” Fatima asked. “Can your love for the Highest One be so deceiving that you need to deny it?”

“We were not disappointed with God, but with those who said they were His intermediaries,” David explained. “The consequence of this disappointment was our need to believe in an objective

world, independent of a system of values. We came to think that, if this objective reality existed, it could be understood through a detailed analysis of facts. Therefore, a study of the parts would necessarily lead us to an understanding of the whole. In the process, we would assume the role of observers, disassociated from everything around us. By disregarding the cause of the trinity, we were left only with time and space, principles that we believed to be objective and absolute—objective, because they were independent from the observer; and absolute because they were common to everybody's experience. However, this vision was thrown into crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century."

"How?" asked the man from the East.

"We realised that time and space were intimately related, and that they weren't objective or absolute, but subjective and relative. This new understanding radically changed our perception of reality. Our absolute reality transformed into a relative one."

### 🐼 **Dialogue on Relativity**

Each eye, a point of view.

Through one eye we can see space in two dimensions;  
two eyes make it three-dimensional;  
three eyes open a fourth dimension in space.

But even all eyes together cannot perceive  
the Great Cosmic Mother.

To see Her, one must do exactly the opposite:  
close them and look inside.



DAVID SAT DOWN on a rock to pull out the small thorn that had stuck into the sole of his foot. The philosopher and the poet made the most of the opportunity and sat down as well, contemplating the greenery surrounding them. When Mama Tuk realised that she was no longer being followed, she returned to David and asked, “What do you mean by ‘relative reality’?”

“It is that quality for which things are not absolute,” he replied. “For example, Fatima’s parable described God from a relative perspective, precisely because He can only be portrayed in relation to what He is not. Her story revealed that if God is everything, then He is absolute and so cannot be shown.”

“Can you be more specific?” asked Mama Tuk.

“For example, the idea of absolute time implies that it is experienced in an identical way by everyone, independent of the person and their circumstances. And the same thing happens with space. Relative time and space, on the contrary, means that each one of us perceives these two principles differently,” David said.

“You mean that you don’t see the forest as I do, although we are both singing the same song?” asked Mama Tuk.

“Exactly!”

“If that is what you mean, my people have always seen reality in a relative way. That’s why we sing the path as we walk it,” she said. “They are called ‘songlines’— melodies that we learned from our ancestors which bring time and space into reality.”

“Classical physics, on the other hand,” David said, “asserted that time and space were absolute and, although they were considered to be closely related, they did not need to share the same attributes. At the same time, it also claimed that they were objective, and so, external from the observer. The observer could, therefore, study them to extract conclusions. From this perspective, inherited from the classical Greek era and the Ancient Egyptians, we began to build what we now call ‘science.’”

“And how did the philosophical school that deals with the cause—that which you call ‘religion’ interpret that reality?” asked the philosopher.

“This same tendency to believe in an absolute and objective reality was also present in religion, which led us to believe in a god external to us. God created and we discovered his creation; God commands, and we respond to his plans; God decides, and our destiny is forged. It was that simple.”

“Many of my Muslim brothers believe in a similar god,” said the poet.

“I think that your people as well as mine have a very similar tendency to involve God in politics,” observed David.

“And what has this science discovered, apart from discerning that reality is relative?” asked Mama Tuk, taking a seat next to David.

“A lot of things. We have discovered atoms and galaxies; identified the makeup of matter; as well as their distribution in the cosmos. We have discovered cells and DNA; we have determined the components of life; and the way in which they evolve and spread.”

“And have you not considered that if everything around us is relative, perhaps those same discoveries could also be a projection of the reality you hope to find?” the woman asked.

“Maybe, yes. At this moment, science is not certain of anything. Maybe we have created DNA as a result of trying to identify a way of transmitting genetic information. Maybe we have created the atom because of our need to explain the makeup of matter. We do not know, since that which we call ‘reality’ appears to be made up of the same fabric as dreams—and in a dream anything is possible.”

“Exactly!” exclaimed Mama Tuk. “Reality is made from the fabric of dreams. It seems that your people have made a huge effort of enquiry to reach the same conclusion that we, the original inhabitants, have always defended. When we walk through the bush, or cross rivers, valleys, and mountains, we do it humming a melody. Why? To sing the landscape into reality. For us the landscape needed to be sung in the beginning so that it could be manifested; and so it is our responsibility to sing it again, unaltered, respecting the melody we were taught by our ancestors, so that it can be preserved.”

David understood what Mama Tuk meant by this. Her idea of “singing the landscape into reality” reminded him of one of the best-known paradoxes in quantum physics, Schrödinger’s cat.

“In quantum physics it is said that an experiment, which is subject to various possible results, stops being a mixture of probabilities and adopts one of the possible outcomes only in that moment when it is observed—but not before. To put it more simply, imagine that you throw a coin into a very deep well. In theory, the coin will keep sinking into the depths of the well, until it reaches the bottom. Then, it will show heads or tails as the two possible results, with a very small possibility that it will have landed on its side leaning against the wall. Current science speculates that none

of the possible results will manifest until it is observed. So, until somebody goes down to the depths of the well to see how the coin landed, it will exist in all its possible states—or it will simply temporarily cease to exist. Only when it is observed by consciousness will it adopt one of the possible outcomes.”

“I see that your metaphysicians are also beginning to make science<sup>111</sup>, which makes me happy,” Vivek said. “It’s clear that essentially we’re talking about the same thing: the result is not manifested until it is observed; the landscape does not appear until it is sung; phenomenal reality does not unfold before us until it is seen by consciousness through the filter of the mind. Having agreed on this, what do you think will happen to the coin?”

“We do not know. Maybe all the possible results exist within parallel universes and only one is displayed to the observer.”

“Which one?” The philosopher asked.

“Perhaps the one that responds to his expectations,” the scientist said.

“The one that the observer sings,” Mama Tuk said.

“Maybe a combination of expectations and karma,” Vivek said.

## 🗨 Dialogue on Karma

Science describes four forces:  
strong nuclear interaction,  
weak interaction,  
gravity, and  
electromagnetism,

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<sup>111</sup> Nikola Tesla said of Einstein and his theory of relativity: “its exponents are brilliant men but they are metaphysicists rather than scientists”. Source: [New York Times, 11 July 1935, p. 23, c. 8].

while it seeks for a fifth that will group them all together.

Eastern mysticism has always defined only one force:  
karma.

In karma, all the other forces are contained.

As mind merges the elements of experience and thought  
to project each individual reality,  
so karma combines all forces  
to create a shared consensual dream  
we call reality.



MAMA TUK WAS silent, reflecting upon what Vivek had said, as though she knew what he meant but could not find the right words to respond. Vivek realised that he needed to explain himself more clearly, so he added:

“Time and space separate the effect from their cause. But this is a fictitious separation because it is a product of our minds. For example, if you see a dead fish on a riverbank, you deduce that if the dead fish is the effect, its death must have a cause. You start enquiring and discover that a few days before someone tipped poison into the water upstream. ‘Upstream’ is the separation in space. ‘A few days before’ is the separation in time. The river and the days separate the effect from the cause, which means that we have to investigate. But when we do not define or enclose time and space, but instead transcend them, we also transcend the duality of existence, to realise that Everything is One: Infinite in space,

Unlimited in time, and Absolute in its cause. When this happens, then we do not see effects as being separate from their causes.”

“That is too complicated,” Fatima said.

“No, let me explain,” Vivek said. “To be perfectly in the now means living in the eternity of time; and being perfectly in the here means living in the infinity of space. For those who know how to live in the here and now, time and space are infinite. They see both the dead fish and the cause of its death at the same time. They see the original action that caused it without this being separated from the effect. Such action is karma; the very meaning of this word is ‘action’. Effect is as related to its cause as the two sides of a coin—because essentially the two are one and the same.”

“But for those who see time and space as finite and relative concepts, the effect appears to be separate from its cause,” said Mama Tuk.

“Exactly!” the philosopher exclaimed. “Space and time are projections of the mind, which splits and limits everything. As a result, we fumble around in the dark, not knowing the consequences of our thoughts, wishes, and actions; not realising that they are the melody that gives life to our reality, and so they are the seeds of karma.”

“Do you mean that those who perceive time and space as infinite are made omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent?” David asked.

“It is not that they are made so; it is that they discover their omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, provided that the mind does not limit them, enclosing their reality in time and space,” he replied. “That’s why everything that surrounds us is relative, because it is a projection of ourselves—a product of our minds. This implies that our destiny is in our hands and nobody else’s.

Even so, the present time is mainly the result of our past actions, and because these actions also affect others, reality appears in a shared fashion; although everyone views it from a very personal point of view.

“Relative,” David said.

“Yes. That is why in the East we say that, to enjoy freedom, we first need to stop the wheel of karma. Stopping it is not something that can be achieved suddenly. One must make it lose momentum.”

“How?” Fatima asked.

“First, by realising how our thoughts, wishes, and actions generate karma. Then we can connect each action with its karmic consequence, and the wheel will start slowing down, allowing us to attain clarity and more freedom.”

“I see,” David said. “Your approach seems the complete opposite to ours. We define ‘freedom’ as the capacity to do whatever we please, limited only by our obligation to respect the liberty of those around us.”

“An ideal way to accumulate karma,” Vivek said.

“What do you mean?” David asked.

“A repeated thought transforms into a desire, and a persistent desire is eventually converted into an action. Karma is generated at each stage. To stop the wheel of karma, we first need to understand the origin of our desires, instead of acting upon them. That is how we see that a desire is no more than an action carried out in the astral realms (*Bhuvar-loka*), and how, from this level of reality, it binds us to a certain destiny. When we realise this, our desires diminish and the wheel loses momentum. Finally, we must harmonise our thoughts, because they also constitute actions—but actions carried out on the mental plane (*Svar-loka*). To realise true

freedom we need to continue in this way until the wheel stops spinning.

### ☯ ***Dialogue on Consciousness***

Everything is consciousness—  
minerals, as sediments subject to pressure and heat;  
plants, as diluted minerals, seeking the light;  
animals, as plants without roots, hunting experience;  
humans, as animals free of instinct, searching for knowledge;  
and angelic beings, as humans free of attachment,  
seeking the Creator of All.



FATIMA HAD NOT been following her companions' conversation for a while. When they had entered into the sphere of exaggerated rationality—especially in the conversation between the two men—she had disconnected so that she could simply feel with her heart, and so experience the state of fullness. Origins, time, space, cause, relativity, and now the final concept—karma. “Why complicate it so much when everything is really so simple?” she said to herself, thinking aloud.

“What do you mean?” Vivek asked.

“Concepts make up a veil which prevents us from seeing things as they really are,” she replied.

“And what is real?” David asked.

“God; only the Omnipresent is real—He Who Sees All,” she answered.

“When my people see a dead fish, we, like you, Vivek, also see the cause of its death,” Mama Tuk said. “Both aspects become obvious and inseparable, because for us, consciousness emerges from the transcendental reality of the Dreaming. Do you remember me speaking of the third reality—that which we define by our actions? Given that the three realities of the Dreamtime together with the material reality all exist in ‘the here,’ we can move between the four realities to see how some define others. That is why living completely in the here also allows us to live in the yesterday, in the now, in the tomorrow, and in the beyond. The here does not have limits, because it comprises and spans everything. But let me explain it to you through a tale about a kookaburra who wanted to fly to the roof of the world.

#### ✦ Fable of the Kookaburra ✦

“Kookaburra?” said the philosopher and the poet at once.

“Kookaburras are birds with a big beak, feathers that are brown in colour, and a call that is like a penetrating laugh. They spend a lot of time perched on tree branches, observing their surroundings in search of easy prey. But the kookaburra of my story was different; instead of hunting for food, he always looked up at the sky thinking, *I want to fly to the very edge of the world; to that place that gives the sky its blue; to the ceiling that the Sun and Moon hang from and through which the light shines, appearing to us as stars.*

“And so, one day the dreamy kookaburra decided he would give it a try,” the woman went on. “He set his course for the midday Sun and flew and flew, beating his wings until dusk. Lost in the darkness of the night, and unable to reach the ceiling that he sought, he decided to return to land. He was upset at having failed in his

adventure, and started to cry. An old bat, surprised to hear the night-time whimpering of a bird that, by day, filled the bush with laughter, decided to stop and ask what had happened.

“‘My friend,’ replied the kookaburra, ‘you who glide through the air like a shadow, spreading the blanket of the night; you who see in the dark, while the rest of us live in the blindness of ignorance; can you tell me how to get to the roof of the world?’

“The bat answered, ‘There is no roof, kookaburra. I asked the air that supports our flight and there was no reply. My call was lost to the immensity of a sky without limits. Your consciousness has no limit, and the Universe is only a projection of your unlimited nature. That is why it would be better for you to spend your time getting to know yourself.’”

“This bat is very wise,” Vivek said, adding, “—what is here is there; what is not here is nowhere.”<sup>112</sup>

“The macrocosm is the microcosm. Get to know yourself and you will know the Universe,” Fatima said.<sup>113</sup>

“As above, so below: the Hermetic principle that confirms a holographic model of the Universe,” David added.

“Well that’s not what the kookaburra thought,” Mama Tuk said. “When he heard the bat’s response, he puffed out his chest and

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<sup>112</sup> “*Yad ihasti tad anyatra yan nehasti na tat kvacit*”: Original quotation from the *Visvasara Tantra*, one of the tantric texts. Tantra is a philosophy that was fully formulated at the end of the Gupta period, the era to which Vivek belongs. *Kashmir Shaivism*, a philosophical school which refers to Tantric texts but comes after Vivek’s era, asserts the same thing in a different way when it says: “*that which appears without only so appears because it exists within (Vartamanava-bhasanam bhavanam avabhasanam antahsthitavatam eva ghatate bahiratmana)*”.

<sup>113</sup> Fatima is repeating the Sufi teachings of her contemporaries, which bear a clear influence from Classical Greece.

said, 'What do you know about the roof of the world when you're blind and cannot see! As for me, I've spent a lot of time observing it, studying it, and trying to find the easiest way to reach it. I've analysed the black blanket of the night and the blue blanket of the day. I wouldn't say that I'm an expert; however, I am knowledgeable. All I need is for someone to point me towards the shortest route.'

"Wasn't the bat's reply good enough for him?" Fatima asked.

"No, and instead of admitting defeat, the obstinate bird decided to try again. Convinced that his first attempt had failed because he had waited for the midday Sun, he set out the following day at dawn. He flew and flew, right through the day; at sunset, however, the darkness trapped him, the clouds disorientated him, and his exhaustion confused him, so that he had to give in and descend once again. When he had returned to land, he alighted in the branch of a small eucalyptus tree. With his pride so injured that he couldn't even cry, he just sat there in silence. Then, he heard a female wombat coming out of her burrow."

"What is a wombat?" the philosopher asked.

"They are the largest marsupials known to man," David said. "They are mammals, and have a rounded body, a bald snout, very fine fur, short ears, and a stumpy tail. They look a bit like small bears."

"The wombat is another nocturnal creature; it is solitary and has strange habits," Mama Tuk added. "To continue the story: when the kookaburra saw the wombat he asked her, 'Oh, wombat, you who know how to guide yourself in the darkness of your burrow, surely you can direct me to the roof of the sky; for they say that the stars are the holes left by your ancestors when they, like me, searched for the light beyond.'"

"The wombat stared at the bird with a look of surprise, then said, 'Why are you so obsessed with the sky, when all you need to live is right here on the ground? Do you think you will find lizards, insects, or snakes to feed on up there? It would be better if you start focussing on what happens here on earth, like others of your species, or you will end up dying of hunger.' The wombat returned to her burrow."

"Her response was very practical," Fatima observed.

"Yes, but that still wasn't good enough for the kookaburra. Although his obsession had already begun to take its toll on him, he was determined to continue his quest. And so, the following morning at the crack of dawn, he took off on a new attempt. He flew and flew, but at dusk, tired from so much flying, he fell to the ground, exhausted, by a river. And there he lay at sunset, about to drop off to sleep, when he noticed a platypus bathing happily in the water. Pulling his head from under his feathers, the kookaburra said, 'Platypus, you seem to have everything. You have a bill and you lay eggs like the bird; like the bat you can sense your prey without having to use your eyes; and you carry your young on your back like the wombat. You—so they say—whose ancestors played in the sky, and in so doing created the foam from which the clouds were born; can you tell me how to reach the roof of the world?'"

"Strange animal!" Fatima exclaimed. "What was her reply?"

"The platypus stopped playing and, looking at the kookaburra curiously, she asked, 'Have you ever tried to reach it?'"

"'Yes, I have, many times, but I always get so worn out that I can't fly any higher and I have to turn back.'"

"'And do you not think, kookaburra, that perhaps this is the very roof of the world you are looking for—the one that defines your own heights? So, is it not better to be like water, which, like you,

also seeks the sky, but accepts its limits to then turn into cloud and enjoy the journey back to earth as rain? Afterwards it will trickle as a stream and flow as a river, finally returning to its source: the vast ocean.”

“I like her reply,” Fatima said. “I suppose he finally admitted defeat, accepting his own limits, to appreciate what he had within his reach?”

“Alas, no. None of the three replies satisfied him. So, the following morning he tried again, to fail once more. Inconsolable, the kookaburra spent that entire night in silence, until dawn came, when he saw a blue-tongued lizard wandering over a nearby rock. When the lizard saw him, he was surprised that the kookaburra did not try to eat him, but instead asked him a very philosophical question.”

“And what did the lizard reply?” David asked.

“He simply looked at him sadly and said, ‘Make like the fire, kookaburra, which rises higher and higher as it finds more to burn. Keep on trying and I’m sure that one day you’ll reach the roof you are searching for.’ The lizard disappeared quickly then, afraid that the kookaburra would change his mind and decide to eat him. However, this was the first reply that, although not completely satisfying, at least gave the kookaburra some hope. *I’ll keep trying, he thought, just as the lizard said I should, and with time and patience I’m sure I’ll get there.*

“And so the days passed by, and with them, the weeks and the seasons of the year. Each morning the kookaburra took flight into the sky until, exhausted or struggling for air, he had to begin his descent. And every day, at dusk, he could be seen sitting, sad and dejected for not having reached his goal. The other kookaburras laughed at him and it is said that they still laugh now, every time they get together and remember his tale.”

“What a sad story!” said the poet. “Did he never learn?”

“Yes. With time and the loss of his youth, his energy diminished. Then, one day he understood the platypus’s advice. He saw that she was one who, playing in the *water* of the rivers and lakes, had accepted her own limitations. From that day on he began to enjoy what he already had, without thinking of the sky that evaded him. A short time later he met a female kookaburra and they fell in love. Together they had children, a family, and with this came the responsibility of searching for food. Since then, our friend has not looked to the sky. Since then, he has spent his time looking down at the *earth* in search of possible prey, just as the wombat suggested.”

“And did he continue to do that forever?” asked Vivek, a little disappointed.

“No. Little by little, the winters passed by and his children grew up. He also got older, and was able to enjoy more time to think. That’s how, one day, remembering the bat’s reply, he thought, *perhaps the world does not have a roof and the best way to explore its vastness is by knowing myself*.

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“What a great story!” exclaimed Mama Tuk’s companions.

“That kookaburra reminds me of modern science, attempting to find an elementary particle,” David said. “In this search, we have tried to find the smallest unit of matter—a sort of base of the microcosm. We have hoped that, in understanding this elemental particle—how it bonds and the laws that govern it—we might be able to understand the totality of the cosmos. But in spite of having built many particle accelerators—each one bigger and more powerful than the one that came before—the elemental particle evades us. It seems that we are stuck with the lizard’s advice, inciting us to keep trying, without thinking that perhaps the

protons and electrons are actually the two edges of a vortex in movement, a vortex that spins as the mirror image of the entire universe.”

The four of them realised that they were talking about essentially the same thing. The philosopher called it, “Everything is Brahman”. The poet defined it when, repeating the teachings of the Qur’an, she recited, “Vision perceives him not, but he perceives all vision”<sup>114</sup>. The painter spoke of it when she said that he who lives fully in the ‘here’ also exists in the first reality of the Dreaming (potential state of pure consciousness), in the second state (past time), in the third (future time), in the ‘now’ (present time), and in the ‘there’ (all what is not here on the material plane). The scientist knew it as a holographic conception of the universe. The difference was only in the way it was expressed, in the route each followed.

“In the Vedānta Advaita, God is called ‘Brahman’, who is One and Absolute,” Vivek said. “Multiplicity is only an apparent manifestation. The power of this apparent manifestation to confuse us and make us see multiplicity where there is only One is what we call ‘Māyā’. Because of this, we think that any attempt to define the Absolute is imperfect. This is why we accept that various cultures arrive at definitions which cover different aspects of this unique reality. We recognise that defining the Absolute with words necessarily limits it. In our most simple definition we say, ‘God is the Absolute’. Even in doing this, we need two concepts: the adjective ‘Absolute’ and the article ‘the’, to define something that is really One. Any other definition, with its increasing number of adjectives, only serves to divide the indivisible.”

“In Islam,” Fatima said, “we use ninety-nine names to describe Allah's attributes. We use these names, not to limit the Creator, but to communicate that His attributes are limitless. Ours is a

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<sup>114</sup> Qur’an – Surah 6 verse 103

language of poets. In poetry, form and content dissolve, and we are then able to better communicate this unique reality. The ninety-nine names of Allah have provided us with the necessary colours and hues to paint a picture of the All-Praiseworthy. On the other hand, we have never wanted to represent the One, Eternal, and All-Able through images or idols, because in them we perceive a limitation.”

“My people do not limit our manner of expressing, communicating, or representing the Great Cosmic Mother,” Mama Tuk said. “This is our way of acknowledging that She is limitless. Dance, music, painting, stories—all of these things are necessary expressions that we have integrated into our culture. They allow us to connect with our spiritual dimension and enjoy the experience of being alive. The perception of One consciousness is a realisation that comes naturally, through attaining spiritual maturity. We prefer to provide the individual with a wide range of experiences that advance spiritual growth, rather than try to indoctrinate them.”

“In clear contrast to the ways of your people, we tend to study phenomenon to generalise them, conceptualise them, categorise them, and break them down to their most basic components,” David said. “This has allowed us, not only to investigate the apparent reality of matter, but also to transform it. And so, we study the parts, until we build an idea of everything that constitutes the Whole. Then, we stop our investigations and wait until each person draws their own conclusion individually.”

“It seems that there are also differences in the ways that we see,” Vivek said.

“Yes, but I think that they’re here to enrich us, to make us realise how diverse Creation is—instead of being an excuse for conflict,” Fatima replied.

“Yes!” the three others agreed.

This was how the four characters of the Mastay brought together their ideas, while also acknowledging those things that made them unique—the rich and varied hues that were to be inherited by a new humanity. Here they learned to combine their knowledge so that they might progress as a culturally rich and heterogeneous, yet united, humanity.

The outcome would depend on how this message, expressed through the esoteric Mastay, grew as a collective wish in the astral planes, and finally manifested in the physical world of matter. Our future was at stake. The third reality of the Dreaming that Mama Tuk had spoken to them about—their future—was already being sung. Mama Tuk knew this, because, unlike the others, she had come from it.

Hers was not the only possible future—there were many others. Mama Tuk’s was not a reality in which technology had taken over, as many people had feared. Nor was it a future in which the human race had ended up throwing stones at each other, as others had dreaded. Of all the possibilities, hers was a reality in which the human race had rediscovered itself. It was a future in which individuals had managed to open their hearts and finally become real human beings.

*Light*



## \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The Point of Culmination \_\_\_\_\_



There are Seven Sacred Directions:

One beneath, to which we look to ground ourselves;  
another above, for which we reach, seeking the sky;  
the four cardinal directions,  
which lead us towards that central point,  
the place where begins our inner journey;  
and finally, the direction leading within,  
so that we might reunite with ourselves.



## 🦉 Poetical Essay

FROM HERE ON we will uncover the esoteric significance behind each of the paths travelled by the four characters in this narrative. This will not be expressed as it has been up until now, through a story adorned with dialogues, but rather, through a poetic essay. This chapter is abundant with symbols and archetypes, for it is in these that we find the language of the subtle realms which reside beyond our thoughts. A poetic mode of expression allows for the indescribable—that which cannot be conveyed with mere words—to be better disclosed to you.

Of all the literary styles employed in this book, the author feels that this is the most profound and should be read slowly. One must pause after each sentence, after each paragraph, as one would rest for a moment on a journey to contemplate the landscape and the message that nature is trying to whisper to one's heart.

## 🦉 The Point of Reunion

FOUR PATHS LEAD to the place where the greatest truths are revealed and all doubts are dispelled. There are four ways to attain a state of consciousness which allows for the mysterious miracle of life to be understood. This is a comprehension beyond the interference of the mind, which stems directly from the source that nourishes us all. There are four paths leading to this place; four routes, divergent in direction but convergent in destination; four crossings furrowed by winds that come to swirl at the same harbour; four courses marked by stars which lead us to a place known by ancient peoples as, “the point of reunion.”

The point of reunion is the ocean into which all the rivers of the Earth pour their waters; it is the site where all pathways meet, all directions converge, and all the greatest truths come to be

understood. In the symbol of the cross it is the intersection; on the pyramid, the apex; in the circle, the centre; in the solar system, the sun; and within the galaxy, the core. In us humans, this reunion begins in our heart and, from here, ascends to the space between the eyebrows, the point from which we see reality without the filter of a mind that tends to embellish, deform, fragment, limit, and cloud the message—the point from which we see reality as it is.

### 🎨 The Path of Art

OF THE FOUR, the path of artistic expression is the most ancient. It allows us to give texture to our inner creativity, to convey it through sound, image, shape, and words. This is a journey that teaches us to rediscover ourselves by unlocking the genius within; to recreate ourselves by passing through the gateway of our imagination; and to find ourselves through perception. It calls for us to hone our awareness so that we might perceive the beauty around us and thereby paint it on the canvas; to develop our ability to feel, so that we might apprehend the forms in nature and mould them in clay or carve them into stone. It requires an understanding of language and the use of words so that we might record our most intimate thoughts.

The path of art belongs to the *earth* element, for it is Mother Earth who bears the colour for painting, the presence for writing, and the body for sculpting. She is the stone that is built into the temple and the canvas upon which we write the story of our past.

Those who travel the artist's path are of a *sensory-emotional* nature.<sup>115</sup> They have the ability to use their senses as the primary channel for obtaining information. These people are granted the opportunity to become knowledgeable about their own environment, for they are blessed as observers and listeners. With the refined use of their senses, they are able to understand things which others cannot even perceive, and then employ their emotions to communicate the reality they have come to comprehend.

In the prophecy of Mastay, those who take this route go by the name of 'the Earth People'. They are represented by Mama Tuk, an Aboriginal painter who comes from a potential reality five hundred years in the future. She hails from the Tropic of Capricorn, from a land where the very ancestors of humanity first walked—the ancient continent of Australia. The Earth People are the original inhabitants of this planet; the guardians of our origins and our most ancient knowledge; and the direct descendants of the Dreamtime. Theirs was a period where the actions of the creative ancestors projected the reality which envelopes us now. The Earth People come to remind us that we have the power to change our environment. They show us that we have the ability either to transform it into a place that is uninhabitable, or to return it to the earthly paradise as it once was and will someday be again, with or without us. Thus, they prompt us to keep our minds and intentions pure so that we might transcend the motives lurking in the shadows of our desires.

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<sup>115</sup> According to Carl G. Jung, the ego has four functions. Jung proposes that all people fall into one of the following categories, depending on the most dominant function present in an individual: sensitive, emotional, thoughtful, and intuitive. Source: Bienenfeld, David. *Psychodynamic Theory for Clinicians*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, (2006):42

To attain the Mother of All Things, the artists' path depends on ritual and initiation, which establishes a spiritual connection between the Creator and her Creation. In the Lakota medicine wheel, the Earth People are related to the healing wind of the South, the colour black, and the Clan of the Tortoise. Theirs is the first nation; those who refused to use writing, the wheel, and money, for they knew that these inventions would make us forget the original teachings.

### ☛ The Path of Philosophy

THE SECOND OF the four is the path of philosophy. This is the intuitive quest to understand who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed. It is also associated with the *air* element, for philosophical thought, like air, is unrestricted in its movement. It is not limited to a particular doctrinal course; it is not contained by orthodoxy. Through philosophy we develop explanations and theories which reveal our true intentions. Some, sadly, become dogmas, walls which close in upon us and restrict our freedom of thought. This happens when a society's ideas, which should aim to expand understanding, deem what is relative to be Absolute and confuses multiplicity for the intrinsic truth.

Those who tread the path of philosophy have an intuitive-thoughtful nature.<sup>116</sup> Because their knowledge is typically sourced through their insights, intuition is the faculty that is most important to them. These individuals delve within themselves to understand the world in which they live, and then share their findings through their thoughts.

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<sup>116</sup> Same as above.

In the Mastay, those who follow this path are called, “the Air People”. They are represented by Vivek, a Vedanta<sup>117</sup> philosopher from the East; a man who was born at the foot of the Himalayas; who was reared next to the highest mountains—mountains so high, that the element of *air* itself is lacking. They say that, at the end of the last ice age, around eighteen thousand years ago,<sup>118</sup> the Himalayas became habitable once again. As the glaciers receded, many of the former inhabitants of this land, who had fled the rising waters, returned. It was these very people who preserved some of the knowledge of the previous cycle. Knowledge, like a yoke fixing an animal to a plough, unites us with the eternal truth.<sup>119</sup>

The philosopher’s path to the Absolute is founded on introspection. The medicine wheel of the Lakota tradition connects the Air People with the wind of wisdom blowing from the East, the colour yellow, and the Butterfly Clan. Though the majority of specialists in the field refuse to accept the hypothesis, I strongly believe that it was the people of the Harappan Civilisation (present-day Pakistan), who reintroduced writing. The most ancient archaeological remains of written symbols date back to

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<sup>117</sup> Hindu philosophy which is classified into six broad schools called, ‘Darshanas’, one of which is Vedānta.

<sup>118</sup> 20, 000 years ago the “Last Glacial Maximum” took place. From then on, the melting of the ice began, which intensified some 10,000 to 14,000 years ago, during the so-called meltwater pulses.

<sup>119</sup> Both the English word ‘yoke’ and the Sanskrit word ‘yoga’ derive from the Indo-European root, meaning ‘to unite’. This applies both to the yoking together of animals and to the uniting of the soul with the Absolute (*Ātman* with *Brahman*).

these very people who, more than five thousand years ago, inhabited the fertile valleys of the Indus River.<sup>120</sup>

## 🕊️ The Path of Religion

THE THIRD IS the path of religion. In this, we follow the footsteps of those who claim to know our origins and our fate; those who, having reached the final destination, have returned to show us the

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120 Malati J. Shendge writes: “It is highly likely that writing originated in the fertile valleys of the Indus rather than in Mesopotamia.” [Source: Malati J. Shendge. “The Inscribed Calculi and the Invention of Writing: the Indus View” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. Vol. 28, No. 1 (1985):50-80]

Shendge bases this hypothesis on:

1. Excavations conducted in Harappa (Indus Valley). However, these have not extended as far as virgin soil, so there is potentially much that remains undiscovered.
2. In Uruk (Mesopotamia), the appearance of writing was sudden, not a process of evolutionary stages. This leads one to believe that the civilisation claimed a system that had already been invented by others; though this contradicts the currently-accepted theory that it was actually the Sumerians who invented writing. Contrary to this, Shendge affirms that in Harappa there is a more clear line of evolution, which began with the use of stamp seals as a means of representing objects.
3. In Harappa, it was common practice to paint signs instead of engraving them in stone or clay. This explains why the wooden tablets, tree bark, and palm leaves, upon which they inscribed their writings did not survive. Linguistic evidence for this is present in the Sanskrit verbal root *likh*, which has two meanings: “to paint” and “to write”. (Shendge refers to this in a footnote, explaining that the currently-accepted theory claims that Sanskrit was brought by Indo-Aryans even though recent genetic studies seem to refute this theory). In contrast, tablets made from clay and stone on which the Sumerians recorded their writings have not perished.
4. Another piece of evidence is that the sign used to refer to a wooden tablet employed for writing upon is the same in Harappa as it is in Uruk (otherwise known as the Proto-Elamite culture of Susa in present-day Iran). Though neither the peoples of Uruk nor those of Susa have recovered these tablets in their regions, Indian scholars utilise them up to this day.

way. This is also the path of the *water* element, for it is like a long river coursing into the sea. Thus, its adherents must be like water flowing along the hundreds of streams that follow this path—streams that empty into a vast ocean known by many names; an ocean that holds all waters and accepts all currents; an ocean which many of us restrict with the horizon of our ignorance, dogma, and orthodoxy.

The followers of this path are of an intuitive-emotional nature. They recognise and affirm, through their intuition, that the divine revelation is the primary source of their inspiration. Through revelation, they establish an emotional connection with the source of their intuition.

In the Mastay, these individuals are known as “the Water People”. They are represented by the Sufi poetess, Fatima, who hails from the Tropic of Cancer and was born in a dry, parched land. Fatima lives in a region where survival depends upon the few rivers and wells that deliver water. This is a region where it is believed humanity gathered to build the first cities after the Great Deluge, and where the streams of human nomadism came to form the first pools of the new cycle.

Those following this route attain the Divine through devotion. The Lakota tradition associates these people – the Water People – with the peacemaker wind of the North, the colour white, and the Frog Clan. They date back to 3,500 BC, and it is my belief that they invented the wheel. This is supported by the fact that the oldest archaeological remains indicating the use of the wheel have been found with the Sumerian Civilisation, in ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). It is no mere coincidence, after all, that oil, the source of energy required to spin the wheels of our modern society, is found in its largest quantities beneath the land of the Water People.

## 🔥 The Path of Science

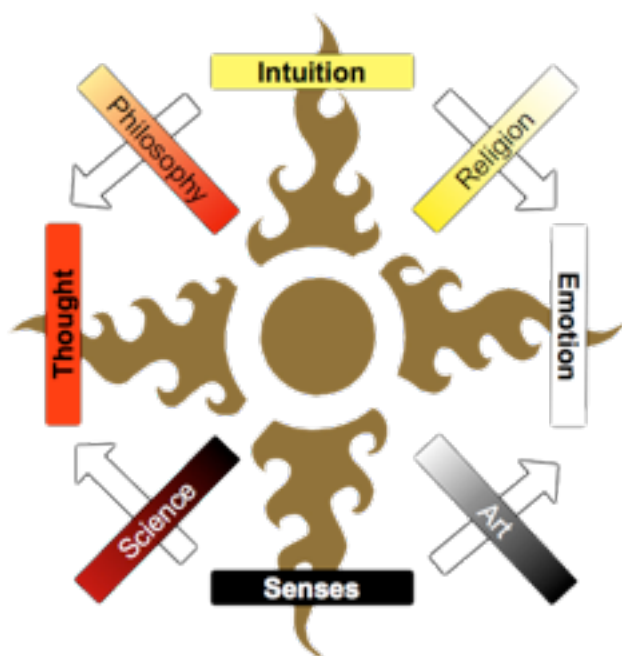
FINALLY, THERE IS the path of science. Unlike art, science does not seek to create, but only to interpret that which was created. Unlike philosophy, it does not strive to understand reality according to great truths, but to deduce its nature through observation. Unlike religion, it is not based on the faithful worship of those who can transmit these great truths, but on the attempt to find truth through the contributions of hundreds of individual researchers. It is the path of *fire*, because, like this element, science finds its origin in a single source, and from this, spreads outwards. Just as fire needs a combustible material as fuel, science requires something tangible to sustain it—that which is empirical and therefore cannot be denied. Like fire, science illuminates, but it also burns. In this way, it has the power to transform as it spreads; but it also has the tendency, if ignored, to reduce everything it touches to ash.

People of sensitive-thoughtful nature are to be found on this path. They use their senses to understand their environment, and then evaluate the information gathered in a rational and logical manner, through their thinking faculty.

In the Mastay, those who follow this path are called, “the Fire People”. They are represented by David, a dissident scientist. He hails from the West—that third of our planet which was all tundra and glaciers before the great melting. His land is of a latitude where the heat from fire is still necessary for survival, a land stripped of its past when, ten thousand years ago, the ice receded and the tundra became green. There, the future is created in the twinkling of an eye by its restless and forever-thirsty people.

The Fire People try to reach God, or an understanding of the Singular, through their own hard work. In the Lakota tradition, the Fire People represent the visionary wind of the West, the colour

red, and the Thunderbird Clan. I believe that these people invented money, which found its origin around the year 3000 BC with the Hebrews, who used it as a unit of measurement. The earliest money was called, 'shekel'. Initially, this word referred to a weight of barley; then, in later times, it was used to designate a portion of the gold and silver that the Phoenicians and Hebrews used to mint their first coin.



### ☪ The Four Characters

BY WAY OF the four paths, we come to learn the stories of those who, through walking them, have unlocked the profound teachings that they bring and promise to us. These stories and legends tell of heroes guided by a single objective: to reach the point of reunion. These individuals are you, me, and everyone else around us. They

## Ether

are, all of them, the inhabitants of planet Earth at this crucial moment of transition and change. In the *Mastay*, a set of characters represent us in such a way that we, as individuals, become either one, another, or a combination of them, depending on the culture in which we were raised, and the cultural identity that we have come to embody.

These four individuals, according to their path, cardinal direction, and other related elements are:

|  | Air                        | Water                    | Fire               | Earth                |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Book Character</b>                  | <i>Vedānta</i> philosopher | Arab poetess             | Western scientist  | Aboriginal painter   |
| <b>Name</b>                            | Vivek                      | Fatima                   | David              | Mama Tuk             |
| <b>Gender</b>                          | Masculine                  | Feminine                 | Masculine          | Feminine             |
| <b>Cardinal Direction</b>              | East                       | North                    | West               | South                |
| <b>Path</b>                            | Philosophy                 | Religion                 | Science            | Art                  |
| <b>Course of Action</b>                | Introspection              | Devotion                 | Work               | Ritual               |
| <b>Branch of Yoga</b>                  | <i>Raja/Glāna</i>          | <i>Bhakti</i>            | <i>Karma</i>       | <i>Tantrism</i>      |
| <b>Jungian Psychological Functions</b> | Intuitive-thoughtful       | Intuitive-emotional      | Sensory-thoughtful | Sensory-emotional    |
| <b>Technological Contribution</b>      | Writing                    | Wheel                    | Money              |                      |
| <b>Clan</b>                            | Butterfly                  | Frog                     | Thunderbird        | Tortoise             |
| <b>Wind</b>                            | Wise                       | Peacemaker               | Visionary          | Healer               |
| <b>Colour</b>                          | Yellow                     | White                    | Red                | Black                |
| <b>Civilisation</b>                    | Eastern                    | Islamic                  | Western            | Original inhabitants |
| <b>Projected Reality</b>               | Now                        | Past                     | Future             | Here                 |
| <b>Time Period of Character</b>        | 6th century                | 13 <sup>th</sup> century | 1971–2012          | +500 years           |

It is no coincidence that each of the four characters hails from a land where the element which is most scarce is the most predominant in the culture to which they were born. The element that is most rare in a particular physical dimension is abundant in the mental and emotional dimensions of those who succeeded in venturing all the way to that location. This is the way Mother Nature compensates for a deficiency, to ultimately establish balance, a state of homeostasis that contributes to the phenomenon of life. Through a combination of the four primordial elements of nature, expressed in both the physical and mental dimensions, societies seek to attain a stage of equilibrium. Out of this arises a fifth element, traditionally referred to as 'ether', 'space', 'ākāsha', 'quintessence', or simply, 'the fifth element'.

The four characters of this book will be accompanied by another four in each of the next three books of the *Mastay* series. Through these characters we will cover all of the various combinations of elements and the cultures identified with them. Eventually, there will be a total of sixteen characters similar to the sixteen directions found in the rose of winds. The fifth book, in addition, will tell us of the one who makes up the seventeenth direction; of our potential to reach the point of reunion, the central point on the cross; and of the star that we can become once we shatter the illusion of materialism.

She who is the carrier of water, the lady Aquarius, is the seventeenth character. She appears to us unclothed, for she has nothing to hide. Aquarius symbolises our detachment from a dominant patriarchal culture. She owns nothing, and so, needs nothing. What she does have: however, is the ability to harness the two currents of life: the positive and negative, *pingala* and *ida*, solar and lunar.



Jean Dodal, 1712

With one hand Lady Aquarius pours water into the river, symbolising the search for the Divine; while, with the other, she pours it onto the land, representing her bond with Mother Earth.

Above her, in the centre, is a sixteen-pointed star. This is Sirius—the brightest star to be seen in the night sky. In ancient Egypt, its heliacal rising<sup>121</sup> marked the beginning of a new year, when the waters of the Nile would overflow onto the river-flats to fertilise the nearby fields, thereby allowing for the new harvest. On the left side, the Tree of Life stands with an ibis in its branches, who meditates upon the scene. He is Thoth, also known as Hermes. Thoth serves as scribe to the gods and witness to the battle between Good and Evil.

This is not a violent and bloody battle, but the Grand Battle, the *Jihad Akbar* that has just been initiated between our lowest

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<sup>121</sup> On this day, the star is visible for an instant in the east, immediately before the sun rises. With every new day, it appears in the horizon earlier and earlier, until the seventieth day when it disappears, before its next heliacal rising, behind the Sun.

dimension, or small self (*nafs*), and Spirit (*Ruh*). It is a confrontation fought in the heart (*Qalb*) of each one of us—in that place which we need to open up. Thoth has returned to remind us of the original teachings. For this reason, in the Ancient Egyptian calendar, he is named after the first month of the year—the month that dawned with the emergence of Sirius.

At the dawn of every new Sun, with the collective awakening of our hearts, we must celebrate the *Mastay*, the reunion of the people of the four directions. This collective awakening opens a fifth path, one which unites and envelopes us all. Like the path of art it seeks to inspire our creative spirit and our sense of harmony. Like the path of philosophy it allows us, through our intuitive perception, to comprehend our origins. Like the path of religion, it arouses devotion and calls forth the divine nature. And like the path of science, we walk it to express ourselves in a measurable and mathematical language. This fifth route is all of this, and even more. It is the path of music, which leads us to delve within ourselves and to listen to the melody of Creation.<sup>122</sup>

According to the prophecies, each one of us will soon be able to hear this melody. The dialogues herein are conversations between four individuals who speak to us from this state of consciousness. They do this to facilitate both our awakening and a global *Mastay*: a meeting of civilisations which will initiate the *Taripay Pacha* or “the age of meeting ourselves again”. Incan prophecies affirm that this

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<sup>122</sup> In Sanskrit, the Heart Chakra is known as ‘*anahata*’, meaning ‘the unstuck sound’. When one opens the energetic centre of one’s heart, one hears a sound with no beginning or end, a sound that is ongoing and forever-present.

meeting will take place in their land<sup>123</sup> in a location named 'Tawantinsuyu', literally "the four (*Tawa*) regions (*suyu*) of the Sun" (*Inti*). Their ancient capital, Cusco, is still considered the navel of the Earth. It is a city of ancient stones, and for over five centuries it has been awaiting the arrival of this new manifestation of glory.

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<sup>123</sup> One of the many transcriptions of this prophecy is to be found in: Melchizedek, Drunvalo. *Serpent of Light: Beyond 2012*, Weiser Books, (2008):227-229. Here, Drunvalo writes: "The young shaman told me that his people has a prophecy that a group of people - he called it a 'world circle' - would come to Peru from all over the world and heal his people of something they had done in ancient times.... According to the Inca priest, it was prophesied that their knowledge, memories, and wisdom would return to them at the moment when this world circle came to their land."

*Transcendence*



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## 7. Ayni

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The Incas used neither writing, nor the wheel, nor money,  
and so they belong to the Earth People.

Their words were written in legends, on stones,  
and in the quipus;<sup>124</sup>

Their wheels were the llamas, the alpacas,  
and the chasquis;<sup>125</sup>  
and their money was *ayni*,  
a practice of reciprocity and solidarity.



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<sup>124</sup> A system of computation using strings and knots to record dates, quantities, and other similar information.

<sup>125</sup> Incan messengers. These men could deliver fresh fish from the coast to Cusco, the capital, in one day.

## 🦉 Transcending Words

THE NUMBER SEVEN represents transcendence, and transcendence can only be attained when we go beyond mere words. This is why Mastay opens with the narrative which makes up the first four chapters of the book. Of all the literary forms, this is the easiest to read. My intention was to deliver those chapters dealing with the elements of *air* and *fire* by engaging the mind, for, like the mind, these elements are masculine. The chapters that speak of *water* and *earth*; however, had to come from the depths of my heart, as they are feminine, and for this reason were all the more challenging to write.

The fifth chapter is a sort of Socratic dialogue. The idea was to facilitate the attainment of a common ground between the four characters and those civilisations they represent. They begin by speaking about the origins, and from there they ascend through the seven notes of the octave. We move from the origins to the concept of time, and from time to space. After this is the discussion on the original cause, relativity, and karma. Only then, does the dialogue between the four characters approach the concept of consciousness. At each and every note, the four civilisations strive to come to an agreement. And at every step, we see that their perspectives come, not to contradict, but rather to complement each other. Their differences serve, not to separate their perspectives, but rather to enrich them.

Through this dialogue in seven notes, I sought to realise the apex; the tip of the pyramid; the point from which one might see the complete view of the four interwoven paths leading to the Mastay, and the Age that it is about to start. To describe this apex, I used a sort of poetic essay filled with symbolism. In this way, I positioned myself within the causal domain of language, one that

exists beyond mere concepts and written words. My aim was to help the reader to perceive things in their true essence.

Here, in the seventh and final chapter, I continue climbing in the hope of going even further. I am not referring to the transcendence of the soul, as there is no likelihood of attaining this state simply by writing or reading a book. What I do aspire to is moving beyond words, and these can only be transcended in one way: through an act of solidarity.

A single act of solidarity; however small, is worth more than all the words in this book, regardless of how beautiful and well-written they are. Thus, I pledge, as the author of this text, that the proceeds obtained from the sale of *Mastay* and all other contributions will go to fulfilling a single objective: “to help restore balance and harmony in our environment as well as in society.”

In this world there is room for everyone. The only thing that is required of us is that we cease to be a burden on our planet, and instead become—both individually and collectively—an asset to it. We need to stop taking, and instead start giving; to cease impoverishing the land and instead begin to enrich it. If we choose to do this, it will not matter that we are seven billion in number, for seven billion can contribute more than five hundred.

This is about imagining a better future; imagining so that we might inspire; inspire so that we might expand; expand so that we might transcend this reality, and replace it with a new, consensual dream. We must cease identifying ourselves with who we once were, and instead start relating to those who we aspire to become. Are you up to this?

## 🔊 Enveloping instead of developing

AS THE AUTHOR of this work, it is my commitment to apply all contributions to non-profit social and environmental projects that 'envelop' the land instead of 'developing' it.

The word 'develop' originated in the mid 17th century, meaning 'to unwrap'. It was during this time that the land ceased to be a commons and started being fenced, possessed, managed and traded. This new relationship with Nature would trigger the Industrial Revolution a century later. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the word began to be used in terms of unleashing the latent possibilities of real estate.

However, it was a speech given in 1949 by Harry Truman—president of the United States at that time—that applied the concept to split the world into three blocks: the first world of the developed nations, the communist block as the second one, and the Third World of the underdeveloped nations, which were later rebaptised as 'developing nations'. Under this new meaning, the millions of people living in the 'Third World' were suddenly defined not by what they could contribute to the rest of the world, but by what a few considered them to lack: development.

Developing involves unwrapping Nature's gifts; exploiting the natural resources. This is why the word has become synonymous with unrestrained growth, reckless consumption, pollution, environmental degradation, disease and unhappiness. The addition of the adjective 'sustainable' has not improved its connotations; rather, it has created an oxymoron—a combination of two contradictory terms.

Words are powerful because they convey ideas, but when the idea being conveyed becomes twisted, the word has to be replaced. Instead of developing the land, we need to 'envelop' it.

Enveloping involves weaving our thread back into the fabric of life: regaining our sense of being part of something larger than ourselves while rediscovering our limitless potential as human beings.

By enveloping the land instead of developing it, we surround and protect it. We wrap it up like a gift to preserve it for future generations, thus regaining our role as divine caretakers.

## Reviews



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## About the Author



MARC COMES FROM Urus, a community in the Pyrenees, the land of the Cathars. The name Urus is of Indo-European origin and it means 'a place where the water springs'. He went abroad in 1995 after graduating from the University of Barcelona, and since then has lived and worked a little in every continent. Through living in other countries, Marc has associated with many different cultures and ways of thinking, especially with those he calls 'earth people'. From them, he has learned a different way of reasoning, and discovered that the future of the planet depends on our ability to learn what such cultures have to offer.

As an author, he writes about spirituality and new tendencies, developing and intermingling genres, making use of both narrative and essay writing. He tries to understand and experience things for himself in order to build bridges, both to unify different cultures and spiritual traditions across the globe.



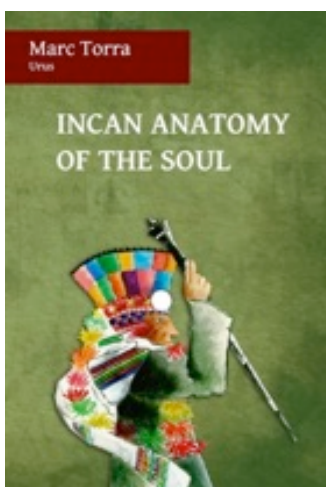
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## Other Books by Marc Torra

### 🦋 Incan Anatomy of The Soul

UPON ENTERING THE age of materialism —around 5000 years ago— knowledge about the anatomy of the soul became a part of various esoteric traditions. It was therefore kept private among a few initiates. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that such information began to transcend the circle of disciples, initiates and followers to become accessible to the remainder of the population.

However, this was not the case in the Andes. As this book reveals, the Inca civilisation conveyed such knowledge openly. It was communicated in their myths and legends, in their urban planning, ceremonies and festivals, dances, symbols and emblems, and in the language. It was 'written' for everyone to 'read' because, by definition, in a culture without a formal writing system, there cannot be illiterate people.



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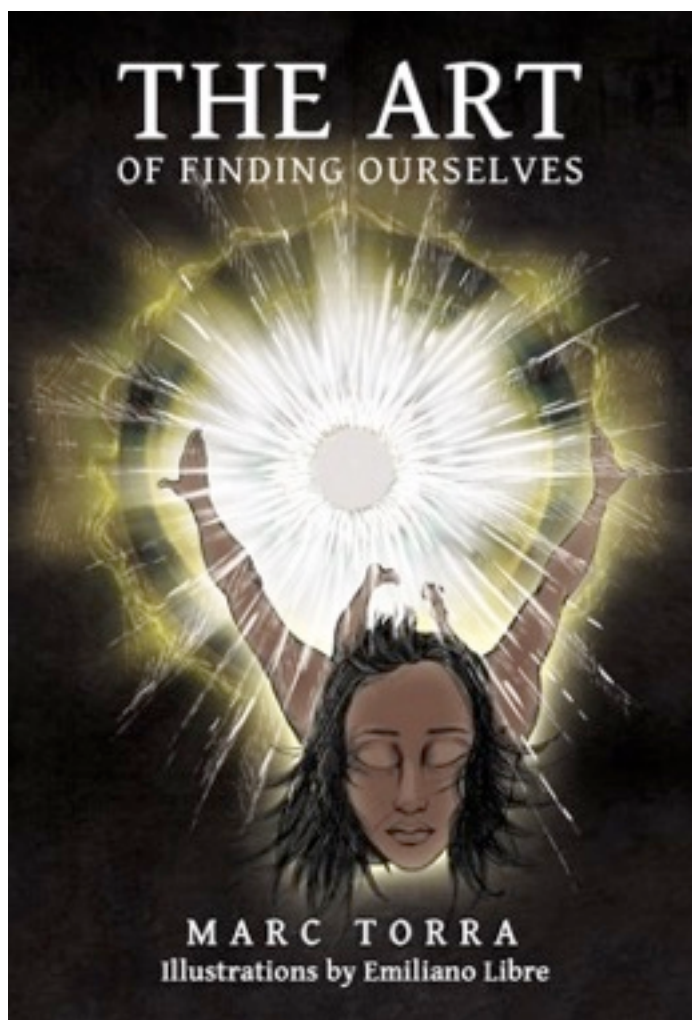
## 🐼 The Art of Finding Ourselves

THIS BOOK IS the first in a series that charts the life of Kusi, a shepherd girl from the Andes, on her journey of self discovery. Through the series Kusi meets various characters that help in her exploration by teaching her the Art of Finding Ourselves.

The practice of this Art equips us with the tools we need to establish a more direct dialogue with our inner Self. This is achieved by identifying behaviours that, after much repetition, have become ingrained in our subconscious. Such habits help us from time to time, but more often than not they hamper our efforts and prevent us from reaching our goals.



Once these habits have been identified, they can be changed by using a sacred bundle and applying techniques associated with the traditional practices of the Andean and Mixtec priests and the Pawnee and Lakota shamans. These techniques enable us to transform the objects in the bundle into expressions of our alter ego—the small self that controls us from within our subconscious. Once the underlying forces exerted by these expressions become visible, they can be easily eradicated.



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